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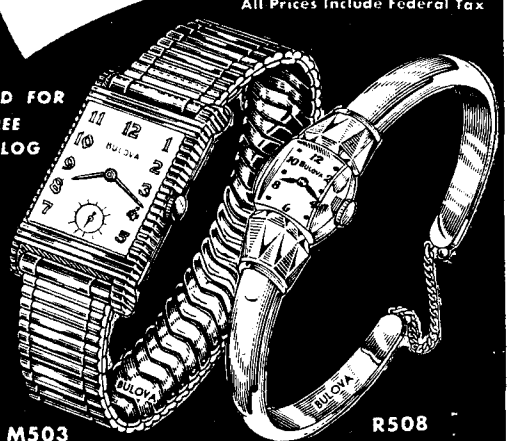

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LATER THAT NIGHT

AT HEADQUARTERS

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FAMOUS
fantastic
MYSTERIES

FEBRUARY, 1952

MARY GNAEDINGER, *Editor*

VOL. 13 NO. 2

Full Length Feature

THE VALLEY OF EYES UNSEEN — Gilbert Collins — 16

Only the extraordinarily courageous or those touched with madness, dared attempt the towering, frozen barriers that guarded the secret of Lost Tibet's Phantom Valley. But three there were who ignored all warning and portent in their quest for its amazing heritage, ordained when the world was young, and jealously held by the Nine, those strange, grim, mystic shadows which were more than mortal.

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Short Story

BLIGHT — L. Major Reynolds — 98

It lived to destroy and destroyed to live, the evil monster whom few had seen and none could kill. . . .

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Features

THE READERS' VIEWPOINT — 6

IN THE NEXT ISSUE — 45

Any resemblance between any character appearing in fictional matter, and any person, living or dead, is entirely coincidental and unintentional.

THE NEXT ISSUE
WILL BE ON SALE JANUARY 18.

Cover by Lawrence. Inside Illustrations by Lawrence and Finlay.

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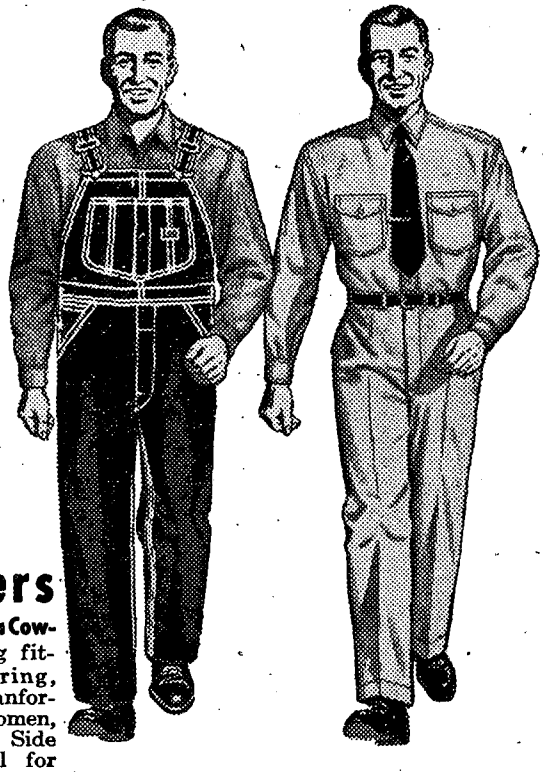

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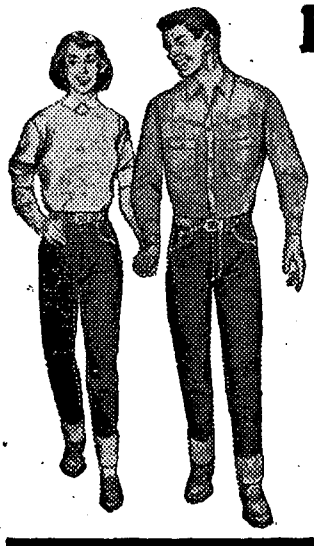

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THE READERS' VIEWPOINT

Address comments to the Letter Editor, Famous Fantastic Mysteries, Popular Publications, Inc., 205 E. 42nd St., New York 17, N. Y.

GREETINGS FOR 1952

Dear Readers:

This February issue is the first of the year 1952 although it will be on your newsstand in time for Christmas. And so the editor can wish all the readers a Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year together!

The year 1952 will doubtless be a great one in the science fiction field and that includes the fantasy field, especially as regards space travel stories and interplanetary novels. We are on the lookout for some of these suitable for our pages. Suggestions from readers will be greatly appreciated.

"Rebirth" in the October issue was a great success. The mail was even larger than usual following this very popular novel and we felt very pleased that we had been able to procure it for the magazine.

The novel featuring the present issue was written by the author of "The Starkenden Quest" which was well liked by F.F.M. readers, and it is possible that you will like "Valley of Eyes Unseen" even better, as some of Mr. Collins' admirers consider this to be a better constructed story, and at the same time one which is equally glamorous. Virgil Finlay, as you will see, has been inspired by it to do some of his very best illustrations.

The novel for the forthcoming issue, "The Death Maker" is a fast moving "mystery" with a "fantastic" background by Austin J. Small. We read it some time back but had difficulty in securing it, but we are persistent in our search for well constructed and truly entertaining novels, and at last we were successful in bringing it to our pages.

"Fantastically" Yours,
Mary Gnaedinger.

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$10 Week in Spare Time. "Before finishing course, I earned as much as $10 a week in Radio servicing in spare time. I recommend N. R. I. to everyone who shows interest in Radio." S. J. PETRUFF, Miami, Florida.

Got First Job Through N.R.I. "My first job was operator with KDLR, obtained for me by your Graduate Service Dept. I am now Chief Eng. of Police Radio Station WQOX." T. S NORTON, Hamilton, Ohio

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Now, special TV kits furnished to build high-definition SCOPE . . . TV set . . . by OSCILLATOR with flyback power supply . . . complete TV set . . . many other units. You see . . . understand . . . new-work more forms. Get valuable PRACTICAL EXPERIENCE building and servicing TV receivers. Mail coupon for facts, Pictures and prices!

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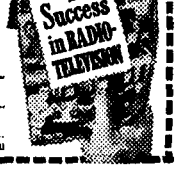

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(Continued from page 6)

McCLARY'S NOVEL A HIT

Dear Editor

McClary's novel was up to F.F.M.'s high standard. I enjoyed it very much. The novelette and shorts were exceptionally good also. I think that we could have done without all that yellow on the cover, though. However, that is just a minor item.

I would like to see a story by F. Marion Crawford or Walter de la Mare, if possible.

If anyone has any F.F.M.s before the September, 1942 issue to dispose of, I would sure like to hear from them. I need them and need them bad. I am now beginning to seriously collect fantasy and hope to build up a good library of it. Here's hoping I hear from a lot of people.

Well, Miss Gnaedinger, keep the F.F.M.s coming and I for one will be very happy.

JOHN C. BLACKBURN.

General Delivery,
Shelley, Idaho.

PRESENT MAKE-UP IDEAL

With all the experimentation you have been doing lately it finally looks as if you have found the ideal format. It should please both sides: those that wanted a "slick" and those who wanted you to return to the old format. While I was satisfied (reluctantly) with the smaller size, I much preferred the old format which your present make-up resembles so closely.

Naturally there will be much back-slapping for the restoration of the irreplacable illos which are so much a part of F.F.M. You can't imagine how gratified I was when upon turning to the contents page, I read therein: "Inside illustrations by Lawrence and Finlay." The double spread on pp. 14-15 by Lawrence is one of his best efforts to date. Finlay's illo for Margaret Irwin's "Monsieur Seeks A Wife," (a wonderful yarn, by the way) was superb. However, I was able to find only one illo by VF, while Lawrence did the rest of the artwork. Lawrence is one of my favorite artists, *but*—if it comes to splitting hairs, I'll take Finlay any day.

Your choice of a lead novel couldn't have been better. T. C. McClary's "Rebirth" ranks right up there with the best of them (believe me, it was a great temptation to resist calling it a "classic."). If you have any more of his work readily accessible, by all means publish it.

Some Haggard would be very welcome. His "Morning Star" (Feb. '50) and a couple of others you have previously published are among my favorites. Haggard, like Merritt, had the knack of bringing the reader, literally, right into the story. Other stories by Haggard which might be suitable are: "Wisdom's Daughter," "Belshazzar," "Nada the Lily," "Moon of Israel," "People of the Mist," and many more too numerous to mention here.

Now, a matter which concerns all of your readers. A friend of mine (Roul Copella, New York, and an ardent F.F.M. reader) has found what we both believe to be an excellent (and much sought after) abbreviation of fantasy. It's "fts." Naturally we would like to see this accepted nationally. Reader reaction to this is both requested and welcomed.

JAN ROMANOFF.

26601 So. Western,
Apt. 341,
Lomita, Calif.

"A REAL FANTASY CLASSIC"

"Rebirth!" and back to the old size for F.F.M. is quite a shock for me, even the cover was above average. Now all I need is loss of memory so I can start all over again and read a real fantasy classic. "Rebirth!"

RALPH PACKARD.
N.F.F.F.

GOOD STORY—GOOD COVER

After reading, "Rebirth," I am a confirmed reader of F.F.M. The last story that I remember reading was A. Merritt's "Dwellers in the Mirage," which was great and hasn't been topped yet, but "Rebirth" has just about tied it. Thanks for a good story and good cover.

GEORGE POIRIER.

P. O. Box 383,
Hartsville, S. C.

"REBIRTH" ONE OF THE BEST

"Rebirth" is one of the best stories I've read in your magazine. I would like to see more like it. I have some rare books by H. Rider Haggard I will sell very reasonably. They are "When The World Shook," "Red Eve," "The Wizard" and "Queen of The Dawn."

I will answer all letters.

MRS. WM. CLOER.

8 Elizabeth St.,
Poquonnock Bridge, Conn.

WONDERFUL STORY

Just finished the October issue of F.F.M. Very, very good.

I see my letter is published in said mag.

I really am a fan of yours now, completely.

I no longer work on the outside, as we have a full time supt.'s job and I must be home at all times now more than ever. I would greatly appreciate any mail I could receive. So at the end of this letter will be my new address. The old one is 897 Bryant Ave. Would you please be able to change it for me, as I left no forwarding address?

I see we have a cover by Lawrence. I really like his unusual but brilliant art work.

As far as I am concerned, there are no words in any language to praise Thomas Calvert McClary for his wonderful story, "Rebirth." You

(Continued on page 10)

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"I signed up for I. C. S. training while working in a plant. Right away things happened. You might say that promotions outstripped my ability to keep up with my I. C. S. lessons. Recently I was made foreman of the welding setup and Assembly Department, and now I'm in charge of training three other men for promotion. Naturally, I'm determined to finish my I. C. S. training."

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(Continued from page 8)

seem to have a grand stock of authors, such as Rees, about whom I wrote about the last letter.

My best to Margaret Irwin for a thrilling story also. "Monsieur Seeks a Wife" is wonderful.

"The Man Who Collected Poe" next and last—"Nobody's House." I think both were grand stories. I also enjoy the readers' pages—some very interesting letters. Keep up the fine work, and you are sure of my 25¢ each ish that comes out.

MRS. ALLEN KOLB.

New Address:
Mrs. Allen Kolb,
905 Summit Ave.,
Bronx 52, N. Y.

BEST THIS YEAR

I was certainly pleased to see F.F.M. had reverted to its old form. The majority of the readers should be satisfied now. I am!

"Rebirth" by T. C. McClary is one of the best yet this year. Certainly the best story in the issue! Second was "Golden Atlantis", then Bloch's "Man Who Collected Poe", fourth was "Nobody's House" and fifth "Monsieur Seeks a Wife". Here's hoping you have more poetry.

Let's have some more stories like Merritt's or England's. How about reprinting "House on the Borderland" or "Men of Deep Waters" by William Hope Hodgson? Let's have some of H. G. Wells' shorts. I would like to see Sir Henry Rider Haggard's "Wisdom's Daughter."

I would like to see a good prehistoric novel. A cave man or a dawn age civilization saga. I'd like an exciting, fast-moving Viking sea-faring novel laid in about 1000 A.D.

For illos Lawrence has presented his best cover I have seen in F.F.M. Virgil Finlay presents his greatest work in F.F.M.

Mr. Finlay's work should be on covers more often. Something like his cover illo for "Devil's Spoon." Bok should work with Finlay and Lawrence on interior illustrations. Bok for shorts, Lawrence for novelettes and Finlay on the novels. Please have at least three Finlay illos for each novel!

One thing more, a personal note to the readers! I'll trade pocketbooks for the following: *Planet*—1940 Spring, Summer, Winter; 1941 Fall, Winter; 1942 Summer, Fall; 1943 Fall; 1944 Fall; 1946 Spring; SSS issue containing "Outlawed World" and "Men Must Die;" *Amazing*—January, 1947; *Galaxy* 1st issue; *Fantastic Story Magazine* 1st issue and the 1948 annual *From Unknown Worlds*. Will trade at rate of two p.b.s for one mag. Three p.b.s for *Planets* up to 1941 and four for the three 1940 ones. Anyone wishing to trade on these terms please contact me.

I shall eagerly await the pleasure of reading the novel in the next issue.

DAVID A. BATES.

840 Asylum Avenue,
Hartford, Conn.

CHECK-LIST BEING MADE

I am compiling a comprehensive check-list of the first ten years of F.F.M., for "fan-publication". Although I have almost complete detail, I have a number of points I would like to check by direct reference to the magazine—*not to existing check-list!* The points to be checked are mainly in connection with art work.

If any fan has a complete set of F.F.M. from Vol. 1 No. 1 to Vol. 12 No. 1, and is willing to check details for me, would he please write to me? As I am stationed in Germany, I am not able to make easy reference to my own collection, and assistance would be appreciated.

CAPT. K. F. SLATER.

13 Gp. R.P.C.,
B.A.O.R., 15,
% G.P.O.,
England.

P. S.—Will you please send stamped, self-addressed envelope with all correspondence that requires a reply?

ENJOYED "REBIRTH"

I am a new reader, but from now on I'm only interested in F.F.M.

I missed "Slayer of Souls."

I believe I enjoyed the October issue the most since "Drink We Deep" in F.N.

I am a great admirer of Poe and I also respect big words. So with Webster's Abridged at my elbow, I read "The Man Who Collected Poe." It actually sounded like a Poe tale. Not only is F.F.M. interesting, but also downright educational. I practically lived "Rebirth." It was so realistic. The cover? *Superb.*

Thank you, Miss Gnaedinger, for the most interesting magazine in existence today. That's my opinion and, I'm sure, that of many others.

You help the younger generation a lot, not only do you give them enjoyment, but F.F.M. is an outlet to their imaginations. I know. I am a senior in Hotchkiss High and have been trying my hand at writing. You have given me many inspirations.

I would like to exchange mail with anyone who is interested in Poe and the outcome of this world.

Good luck, to all of you!! Keep up the good work!!

I remain an appreciative fan,

ARLOA BEAL.

Hotchkiss, Colorado.

P. S.—I promise to answer all letters.

COMPILING NEW BOOKLET

I am not in "Who's Who" or anything else, but I am collecting material for a mimeographed booklet "How to Form a Science Fiction Club."

Perhaps your readers can help me out, particularly those who have organized clubs or have attended them.

What I want would be the names, addresses, emblems, constitutions, and anything and everything pertinent to forming and operating such a club.

As I intend to use this material in compiling data for this booklet, I shall try to send each donor a copy when completed.

(Continued on page 12)

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I need 500 Men to wear SAMPLE SUITS!

PAY NO MONEY—SEND NO MONEY!

My values in made-to-measure suits are so sensational, thousands of men order when they see the actual garments. I make it easy for you to get your own suit to wear and show—and to MAKE MONEY IN FULL OR SPARE TIME! MY PLAN IS AMAZING! Just take a few orders at my low money-saving prices—that's all! Get your own personal suit, and make money fast taking orders. You need no experience. You need no money now or any time. Just rush your name and address for complete facts and BIG SAMPLE KIT containing more than 100 actual woolen samples. It's FREE! Get into the big-pay tailoring field and earn up to $15.00 in a day! Many men are earning even more! You can begin at once in spare time to take orders and pocket big profits. All you do is show the big, colorful different styles. Men order quickly because you offer fine quality at unbeatable prices. Yes—superb made-to-measure cutting and sewing—and complete satisfaction guaranteed. It's easy to get first orders, but repeat orders come even easier. With my big, complete line you begin earning big money at once and you build a steady, big-profit repeat business at the same time.

No Experience—No Money Needed
EVERYTHING SUPPLIED FREE!

You need no money—no experience—no special training. Your friends, neighbors, relatives, fellow-workers, will be eager to give you orders once you show them the outstanding quality of the fabrics, the top notch fit of made-to-measure tailoring and the money-saving low prices. Every customer is a source of additional prospects. In no time at all, you'll find the orders rolling in faster and faster. And every order puts a handsome, spot-cash profit in your pocket! Mail the coupon for your big FREE OUTFIT of styles and samples NOW!

Mail Coupon for FREE OUTFIT!

We supply everything—sample fabrics, full-color style cards, order forms, measuring materials—all packed in a handsome, professional leatherette-covered carrying case. Work full time or spare time. Either way you'll be amazed at how fast you take orders and how your profits begin to mount! Fill out and mail coupon today.

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523 S. Throop St., Chicago 7, Ill.

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(Continued from page 10)

Shelby Vick is working with me and he will do the art work and help in compiling this information.

The more information and ideas, the better this booklet will be. This is open to anyone who has any good ideas on the subject.

ORVILLE W. MOSHER III.

1728 Mayfair,
Emporia, Kansas.

FROM ACADEMIC HEIGHTS

Congratulations on Bloch's "Man Who Collected Poe." It is very cleverly done, and shows remarkable sensitivity to Poe's style; even the bad pun "Poe-etic" is to be paralled in his work; he said he was "a poet to a T." And although one may not think of it offhand, Poe did revive some plays in 1845. Poe specialists do worry about when he grew his moustache (after 1845, and by 1848) because there is no very clear evidence about the matter. The price named for "Prose Romances" seems a bit high, but I think it a harder book to get than "Tamerlane." I was highly complimented to see my own name coupled with that of Quinn, and rather hope Bloch will some day try his hand at finishing Poe's only incomplete story, "The Lighthouse."

THOMAS MABBOTT.

Hunter College,
New York 21, N. Y.

NEEDS HELP WITH INDEX

I am now preparing for publication as a hard-cover book an "Index to the Science-Fiction Magazines." Work was begun on this in 1935 and it covers *all* the American science-fiction and most of the fantasy magazines from 1926, thru 1950. The list includes *Fantastic Novels, Famous Fantastic Mysteries, A. Merritt Fantasy, Super-Science Stories, Astonishing Stories* and 40 other magazines; over 1250 issues in all. There will be close to 30,000 alphabetical entries in the indexes by author and title as well as checklists of all magazines indexed.

In addition it is desired to include all the information on pseudonyms that can be *definitely verified*. To insure correctness, only information from such first-hand sources as the authors themselves, editors and agents will be used.

Therefore, I would like to ask all authors who have used pen-names in the science-fiction or fantasy fields to send me the information at the address below. In the case of personal pseudonyms, the name alone is sufficient. Where stories have appeared under "house names" I will need the titles of the individual stories, with the by-lines they appeared under.

Since transcription of the final manuscript from the file-cards will begin around the first of the year, the sooner this information is received, the more certain it is of inclusion.

DONALD B. DAY.

3435 NE 38th Ave.,
Portland 13, Ore.

LITTLE MONSTERS ORGANIZE

The Little Monsters of America are trying to form a local chapter in the New York City Area. As of now, we have the magnificent total of eight members. Needless to say that we would like more. We would like to put out a fanzine, but that and other things must wait till we recruit some more Little Monsters. The idea is sponsored by Lynn Hickman, the Master Monster. Anyone interested can get all the info by writing to me at the address below. This is *not* an appeal for correspondents.

L. WILLIAM HOHE.

937 Fulton St.,
Brooklyn 16, N. Y.

FANTASY POLL

I am conducting a poll to discover what fantasy stories are most popular, and am asking all readers of F.F.M. to send a list of their thirteen fantasy favorites.

At present van Vogt's "Slan!" is leading with six votes. "Dracula" and "Frankenstein" have five each, and "The Willows," "The Ship of Ishtar," "A Martian Odyssey," and Hubbard's "Fear," each have four.

Come on, fen—a postcard's only a penny. Vote for your thirteen favorites. When all votes are in, I'll report the results through F.F.M. Also, to Ed Noble, who was good enough to print my request in his fanzine, *Explorer*.

Thanks,

NELSON BRIDWELL.

120 N.W. 29th,
Oklahoma City 3, Oklahoma.

LIKES OCTOBER FORMAT

It's been a long time since I wrote a letter to you. This time it is to thank you for the change back to old format. I didn't care much for the smaller size. It didn't seem like *the* F.F.M., and this October issue was certainly welcome to me. I have all the older issues bound into book form. The last few years I have been too busy to get any more binding done. (I do all the work myself.) Let the other mags go for that fancy dress and give us fans the classic stories. F.F.M. will always hold fan interest as long as we get such stories as the "Slayer of Souls". Stories like this one will never grow old. New fans rave about it just like I did many years ago.

I imagine that there are many fans who want back copies of F.F.M. and F.N. Would you please let them know that the old *Stf Trader* is revived and that they can get info about it from the publisher, Jack Irwin, Box 3, Tyro, Kansas. Rates are very low for Ads and subs are lower than most fanzines.

Thanks again for all the swell stories that you have been giving us since 1939.

K. MARTIN CARLSON.

1028 Third Ave., South,
Moorhead, Minnesota.

(Continued on page 14)

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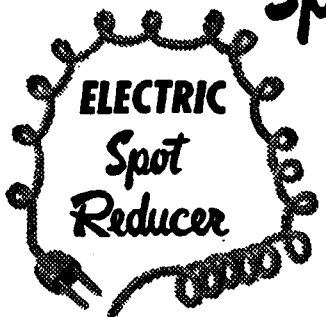
Reducing Specialist Says:

LOSE WEIGHT Where It Shows Most REDUCE MOST ANY PART OF THE BODY WITH

UNDERWRITERS LABORATORY APPROVED

Spot Reducer

Relaxing • Soothing Penetrating Massage



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Without Risking HEALTH

Take pounds off—keep slim and trim with Spot Reducer! Remarkable new invention which uses one of the most effective reducing methods employed by masseurs and turkish baths—MASSAGE!

LIKE a magic wand, the "Spot Reducer" obeys your every wish. Most any part of your body where it is loose and flabby, wherever you have extra weight and inches, the "Spot Reducer" can aid you in acquiring a youthful, slender and graceful figure. The beauty of this scientifically designed Reducer is that the method is so simple and easy, the results quick, sure and harmless. No exercise or strict diets. No steambaths, drugs or laxatives.

With the SPOT REDUCER you can now enjoy the benefits of RELAXING, SOOTHING massage in the privacy of your own home! Simple to use—just plug in, grasp handle and apply over most any part of the body—stomach, hips, chest, neck, thighs, arms, buttocks, etc. The relaxing, soothing massage breaks down FATTY TISSUES, tones the muscles and flesh, and the increased awakened blood circulation carries away waste fat—helps you regain and keep a firmer and more GRACEFUL FIGURE!

Your Own Private Masseur at Home

When you use the Spot Reducer, it's almost like having your own private masseur at home. It's fun reducing this way! It not only helps you reduce and keep slim—but also aids in the relief of those types of aches and pains—and tired nerves that can be helped by massage! The Spot Reducer is handsomely made of light weight aluminum and rubber and truly a beautiful invention you will be thankful you own. AC 110 volts. Underwriters laboratory approved.

TRY THE SPOT REDUCER 10 DAYS FREE IN YOUR OWN HOME!

Mail this coupon with only $1 for your Spot Reducer on approval. Pay postman $8.95 plus delivery—or send $9.95 (full price) and we ship postage prepaid. Use it for ten days in your own home. Then if not delighted return Spot Reducer for full purchase price refund. Don't delay! You have nothing to lose—except ugly, embarrassing, undesirable pounds of FAT. MAIL COUPON now!

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(Continued from page 12)

COLLECTORS' BOOK PLANNED

I had some bad luck on my last letter to F.F.M. Before the October issue came out, I moved to this address from 1411 DeKalk Ave., Brooklyn. My change of address notice was mislaid at the post-office, and nothing was forwarded from there until I checked up last week. Since then two letters have arrived in response to my plea for information. Must have been earlier ones.

If any interested fans care to try another, or first, letter to this permanent address of mine, I'll be glad to hear from them. The same subject: information on dates, volume, and number of borderline fantasy magazines, for inclusion in a fantasy magazine checklist. A postcard will bring a more detailed explanation and the names of the magazines wanted.

This is a serious effort to complete a collectors' handbook. My partner and I have the names of 139 fantasy magazines, and need help on the last 39.

BRADFORD M. DAY.

127-01 116th Ave.,
S. Ozone Park 20, N. Y.

FAN CLUB MAGAZINE

I was sorry to learn of the return to the old format of F.F.M. But at least you have kept the new logo, which is a distinct improvement.

The cover is absolutely beautiful. This and the pictures for the lead novel are among the best Lawrence has ever done in his long and varied career as an illustrator.

As yet I have not had the opportunity to read any of the stories in the October issue, although I started the tale by Robert Bloch. But I am sure they will all be excellent, relying on the good taste you have shown previously. Incidentally, are you sure the tale by Bloch is not a newly discovered unpublished Poe, that R.B. dug out of some garret while paying homage to the Master's favorite haunting grounds of Providence?

At this time, I wish to thank you for the publicity you have given the ISFCC through the publication of my letter in the October issue concerning this club. Ed Noble, mentioned in my letter, tells me he has already received many requests for information, and the sample copies of *The Explorer*, the official organ of the club.

I now want to repeat this information. The ISFCC—short for the *International Science Fiction Correspondence Club*—is constantly seeking new members. There are over a hundred members at present, with more joining all the time. The club publishes a fan magazine, *The Explorer*.

There are no dues to the club. All that is necessary to become a member in good standing is to take out a subscription to *The Explorer*, for the low price of fifty cents for the year, or only eight and two-thirds cents per copy. Single copies are available for ten cents each, from Ed Noble, Jr., Box 49, Girard, Pennsylvania.

ROBERT P. HOSKINS.

Lyons Falls,
New York.

"SNAKE MOTHER" IN F.F.M.?

I echo a letter I read in Readers' Viewpoint, not verbatim but only the idea. Why can't a magazine be published with stories comparable to the work of the masters you publish in F.F.M. and formerly in *Fantastic Novels*? We want good literature and there are many who can write that way. I am heartily sick of the simulated newspaper accounts of fictitious happenings.

The writer I refer to said she was probably old-fashioned. I can assure her she is not. There are thousands who join her in the wish for good stories and who would buy a magazine of that type. The desire for stories of that kind, and the disgust many feel with the current low in fantasy and science literature was incapably and acidly described by a friend with a PHD after his name. We entered my favorite book store together and he picked up what was formerly his favorite magazine. After glancing through it he tossed it back and said, "simple little stories for simple little minds."

I want to praise you for your ability as an editor, and heartily thank you for the opportunity you give to us, the forgotten ones, to read good stories. I have but one quarrel with you. When do we get A. Merritt's "The Snake Mother"? Lo, these many moons it has been promised. Or is it to be a shadow form of a shadow world; a something that might have been?

C. LODUM, PHD.

Editor's Note: We have published "The Snake Mother" before, but it is possible that we shall bring it out again in F.F.M. In the meantime, there are new stories that would seem to be wanted more.

HAPPY TWELFTH BIRTHDAY

Thank you for printing my last letter (October '51) but I must correct a mistake I made in it. The letter implies that I am writing to 250 people, when in reality I meant I had only written 250 letters to 18 people. Besides the fans in this country, I also write to Japan, Scotland, Sweden, Belgian Congo and South Africa. Soon I expect to establish regular correspondence between myself and a young man in Germany and a young man in Athens, Greece.

I see that two G.I.s request mail. Well, I was thinking that it would be a good idea to put in a request myself. Yeah, I want all the G.I.s who want to receive mail to write to me! I'll answer them all as they come and I am sure that I can count on "L.L.'s No. II—III and IV to give me a hand if I get swamped. It's the least I can do and I know (and no doubt so does Mrs. Allan Kolb—October '51) how much it means to receive mail. I have found people in this country to answer letters from Arabia to Zanzibar and have never yet found any person who has complained about receiving mail. (These G.I.s can discuss anything they wish and those who wish to have the latest info on stf. and fts. can rest assured I'll do the best I can.)

To get to stories in F.F.M., all I can say is that although "Rebirth" was quite good and

(Continued on page 113)

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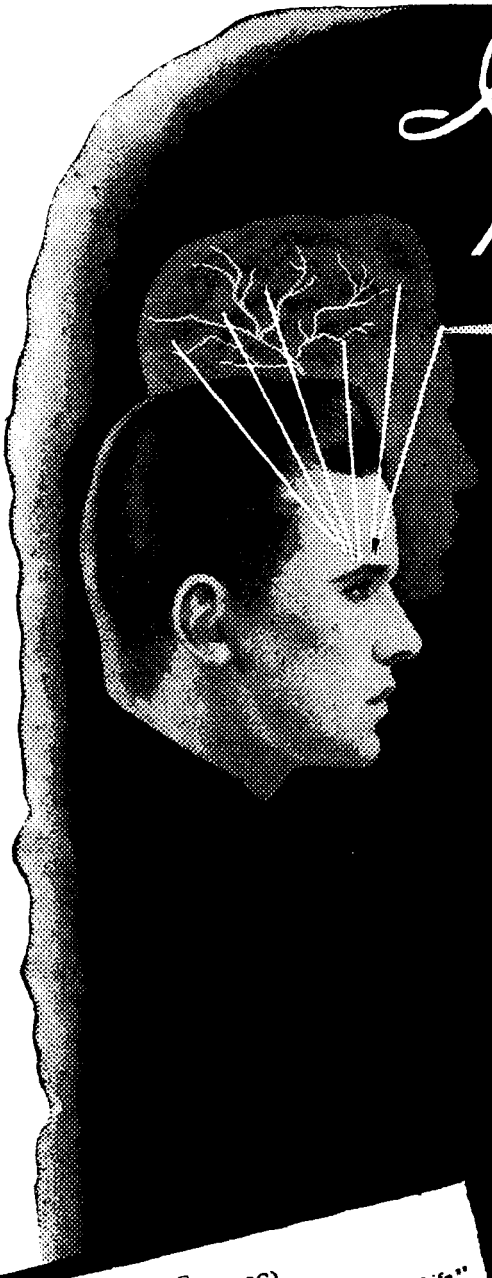
In Your Mind's Eye



The Secret of MENTAL CREATING

IF you just like to dream, read no further. There comes a time when your fancies *must be* brought into light—and stand the test of every-day, hard realities. Are you one of the thousands—perhaps millions—whose thoughts never get beyond the stage of *wistful wishing*? Do you often come to from a daydream with the sigh, "If only I could bring it about—*make it real*?"

All things begin with thought—it is what follows that may take your life out of the class of those who hope and dream. Thought energy, like anything else, can be dissipated—or it can be made to produce actual effects. *If you know how to place your thoughts* you can stimulate the creative processes within your mind—through them you can assemble things and conditions of your world into a happy life of accomplishment. *Mental creating* does not depend upon a magical process. It consists of *knowing how* to marshal your thoughts into a power that draws, compels and organizes your experiences into a worth-while design of living.

ACCEPT THIS *Free* BOOK

Let the Rosicrucians tell you how you may accomplish these things. The Rosicrucians (not a religious organization), a world-wide philosophical fraternity, have preserved for centuries the ancients' masterful knowledge of the functioning of the inner mind of man. They have taught men and women how to use this knowledge to *recreate their lives*. They offer you a free copy of the fascinating book, "The Mastery of Life." It tells how you may receive this information for study and use. Use coupon opposite.

SCRIBE: C. M. F.
The Rosicrucians (AMORC),
San Jose, California.

Please send free copy of "The Mastery of Life," and I shall read it as directed.

Name.....

Address.....

City.....

The **ROSICRUCIANS**
(AMORC)
SAN JOSE CALIFORNIA

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THE VALLEY OF EYES UNSEEN

By Gilbert Collins

Only those touched with madness dared attempt the towering, frozen barriers hiding the secret of Lost Tibet's Phantom Valley. But three there were who ignored all warning in their quest for its amazing heritage, that was so jealously guarded by the mystic Nine.

Prologue

THE tale begins in my rooms in Peking, in the north of China, one bitter morning many years ago. The scene is stamped ineffaceably on my recollection, so that even without the help of certain confirmatory details, such as the overturning of the coffee pot, I am able to say with certainty that the hour of day was breakfast time. The breakfast table was the central point of a triangle formed by the blazing fire in the grate and two ponderous oil stoves farther out in the room: for this was in the punishing old days before that gift of the gods, the steam-heated radiator, came to soften the arctic

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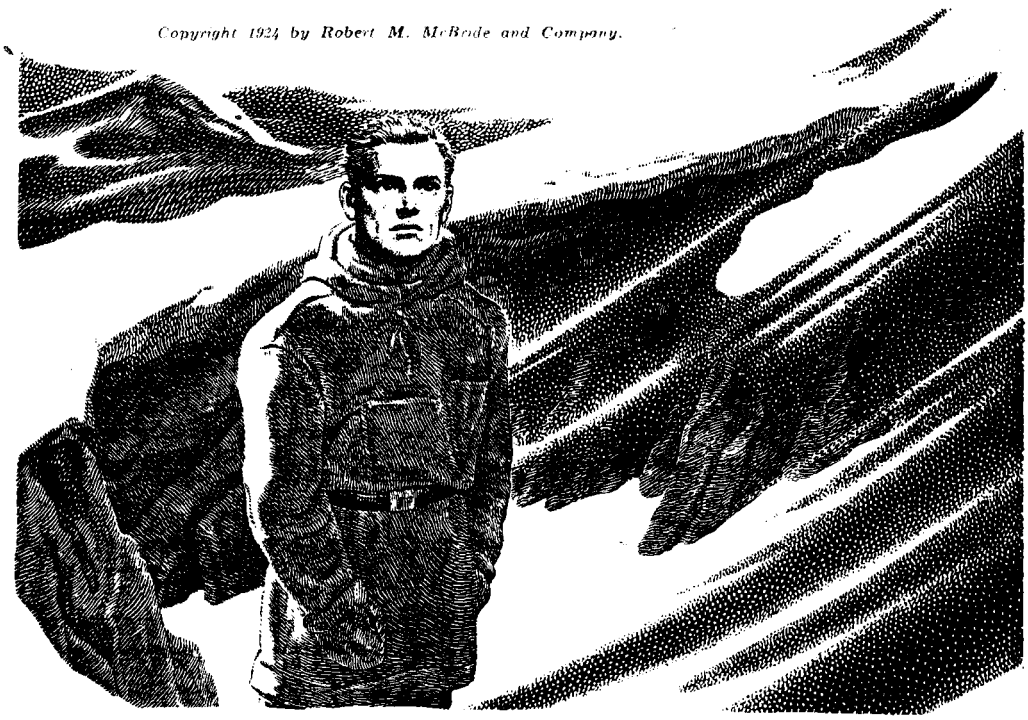

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The vision faded . . . but parts of it remained clear. . . .

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rigours typical of a North China winter.

My number-one house boy had brought in the morning paper and laid it on my table, but it was without any lively anticipation of delight that I picked up the straw-blemished, hazily printed sheet. The local press of the time was not of enthralling interest; and what news of the outer world filtered through to our buried corner of Asia in erratic dribbles was apt to be still further marred by the bold but not always illuminating innovations of the Chinese compositors in setting English type. I was idly turning over the spavined issue of this morning when something caught my eye in the middle column of the middle page. A moment later the sheet was fluttering to the floor, and a river of boiling coffee sluiced out over the cloth of the breakfast table.

I picked up the fallen newspaper and began to read. The age-yellowed sheet lies before me as I write, and the following, save for numerous typographical errors which I have not copied, is an exact transcript of the report that had given me this sudden start:

MYSTERIOUS AFFAIR IN SHANGHAI. DISTINGUISHED ORIENTALIST DEAD, IS REPORT.

Our Shanghai correspondent writes: "Mr. Ronald Mirlees, the well-known author, was discovered dead in the Marco Polo Hotel of this city, this morning about eight o'clock, under circumstances of considerable mystery. The deceased was well known to the management and staff, having frequently stayed at Marco Polo before, in the intervals between his journeys to other localities of China on research work. It is believed he had just returned from one such expedition three months back, when he took possession of the two first-story rooms he was occupying at the time of his death.

"Mr. Mirlees lived apparently much alone, hotel servants state, remaining busy at work in his apartment all day and barely desisting from his labours to take meals which were brought up to him; indeed house boy whose duty it was to attend to Mr. Mirlees alleges that more than once he found the scholar at work in the early morning, his bed not slept in; from which it is assumed at the hotel that Mirlees was for some reason or other working against time to complete one of those contributions to oriental research with which his name has become associated.

"When house boy entered Mr. Mirlees' apartment this morning he found deceased at his writing desk apparently deep in composition. Deceased's back was turned to the door, and not until the servant had asked Mr. Mirlees what time to serve breakfast and received no reply that he suspected anything was untoward. Then he approached and saw. The boy becoming terror-stricken screamed for help, and other servants rushed in, followed by Mr. Alexis Delabre (Manager, Marco Polo Hotel), who overheard the boy's cries. Medical aid was at once summoned, but quite unavailing, death having apparently supervened several hours before as muscles of deceased were already set fast in *rigor mortis*.

"Witnesses one and all lay especial emphasis on gruesome nature of the discovery. The body, they allege, was placed in so natural and lifelike an attitude that until spectators had come right across the apartment and looked from that side they were unable to credit they were looking upon a corpse. Expression on features of dead man is stated to have been one of extreme horror, not pain—witnesses are unanimous upon that point—but sheer and unmistakable horror. Mr. Mirlees held a pen in one hand and there were sheets of paper before him, but no mark upon them.

"There, in fact, lies another mysterious feature of the case. No trace can be found of the voluminous writings upon which Mr. Mirlees is lately known to have been engaged. Only possible explanation would appear to be that prior to his decease he had forwarded his manuscripts elsewhere, and that he was meditating composition of another when death overtook him. Medical evidence, however, places hour of decease about two a.m., and why the defunct man should remain at his desk far into the night without putting pen to paper is another point which remains shrouded in obscurity.

"No cause so far has been assigned for Mr. Mirlees' sudden end, and the strange and tragic affair will of course necessitate coroner's inquest. Mr. Mirlees was thought to be enjoying good health, though his manner had been observed to be moody and distraught for some time, as if he were prey to some severe mental stress. This, however, is alleged by those who knew deceased orientalist best to have been a not uncommon mood with him.

"Mr. Ronald Mirlees was a widower, having lost his wife in Shanghai some years back, and so far as is known leaves no relatives to mourn his loss. His death will be keenly felt among scholarly circles of the Far East, however, and indeed of the East generally, to whose researches in oriental art and archaeology he contributed matter of recognized value, though not a few of our prominent sinologues were disposed to regard Mr. Mirlees' essays as more brilliant and imaginative than sound.

"His best known and most characteristic work was the volume entitled 'Treasure of

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Asia,' which appeared only last year, and, as is no doubt still fresh in the minds of our readers, aroused a storm of controversy not only on this side of the world, but also among the learned societies of Europe and America. At the risk of repeating facts already known, we will here state that Mr. Mirlees' work embodies much original matter of deep interest concerning the Buddhist faith and Buddhist temples of China, dealing more particularly, as the title indicates, with instances of treasure buried in and around the ancient shrines.

"The deceased author's critics, and there were many, challenged his statements on grounds of fact, alleging that no authentic evidence of these supposed hoards exists, and especially on the score of propriety, as they feared that Mr. Mirlees' allegations would have the unfortunate effect of attracting to this country an undesirable class of treasure-hunters who would desecrate the religious sites in the mere hope of gain.

"We are happy to record that this fear has not been realized. Such excavations as have been made have been carried out under the auspices of duly authorized oriental societies, and though the finds so far brought to light have not been extensive, they have afforded considerable proof of the shrewdness and accuracy of Mr. Mirlees' speculations.

"It is admitted at least that the deceased scholar had opened up a branch of study of peculiar fascination: a line of research which, if not absolutely new, has so far never been sufficiently explored; and there seems reason to anticipate that later excavations will still further vindicate his arresting and outspoken views.

"Mr. Mirlees had something of the scholarly recluse in his disposition, and was personally known to but few residents in this country; he was, nevertheless, well liked and admired by such as were privileged to enjoy his friendship, and his death while still in the prime of life—he was in his thirty-seventh year—will be universally deplored."

THE foregoing item of news came to me with a peculiar poignancy and shock. I was one of those few persons quoted in the report as having enjoyed the privilege of Mirlees' friendship. I had not known him intimately, it is true, or for any great stretch of time, but there are circumstances which cement friendship more swiftly by far than mere knowledge of a man's history and companionship with him in the common workaday run of the world. If to have shared a strange and perilous adventure and to have escaped with him a horrible death by violence be title to friendship, I was indeed the friend of Ronald Mirlees. The details of this affair I have recorded elsewhere, and need not recount at any length here.

It is enough to say that after making Mirlees' acquaintance in the queerest and most unconventional way, I accompanied him on an expedition to an ancient Buddhist temple some forty miles out from the city of Peking, where, by deciphering the inscription carved on the inner surface of the great temple bell, Mirlees hoped to locate a rich hoard of buried gems, an offering to the shrine by some pious donor of the remote past. How we were received by the last surviving priest of the sect, how he most subtly and devilishly plotted to murder us both, how he lost his own life in the attempt and was even instrumental in directing us straight to the cache, and how we took possession and escaped with our bare lives, pursued by a band of the local peasantry out to kill—these matters, as I say, have been chronicled in another place.

After that episode Mirlees returned to Shanghai, which he was wont to make his headquarters, and I heard no more of him until the publication of that remarkable book entitled "Treasure of Asia" sent his name whooping round the erudite world. Our North China adventure was not specifically recorded in that work—I imagine that Mirlees judged the affair too recent to be safely alluded to, fearing lest our ownership of the treasure trove be disputed. But it unquestionably afforded to himself, if he needed such, a crowning proof of the soundness of his views, to say nothing of ample funds wherewith to meet the expense of publication.

The report of the inquest came a few days after the news of Mirlees' death. Nothing had been found to account satisfactorily for this, and the medicos were obliged to wrap their ignorance in a few foggy generalities regarding obscure affections of the heart. The finding would have far from satisfied public opinion at Home. It left me distinctly sceptical even in so raw and haphazard a region as the Far East. There was something hidden, some mystery left unraveled. Mirlees' age had been correctly stated in the newspaper report as only thirty-six years; he was, moreover, of that "hard-bitten" type which, if it dies young, does so only by a violent or unnatural death.

I was still pondering the melancholy problem a week later when I received from a firm of solicitors in Shanghai a letter stating that in pursuance of the request made to them some days before by their client, the late Ronald Mirlees, they were forwarding to me, separately, a parcel which he had left in their charge. The lawyers added that while respecting the promise Mirlees had extracted from

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them not to reveal this matter to any third party, they relied on my honor to make public any evidence the parcel might contain which would help the authorities to arrive at some conclusion regarding Mr. Mirlees' mysterious death. Of the contents of the package they themselves were totally ignorant.

A day after that the parcel arrived. I tore off the outer covering and found inside it a bundle wrapped in stout oilskin, sealed at every point and so enmeshed in cords that I could scarcely read the legend on the two labels. They were addressed to me in a curiously scrawled writing, and when I had taken off this cover, there dropped out a small fat envelope in the same hand, but more recognizable to my eye. It was, so far as I could remember, the writing of Ronald Mirlees. It ran as follows:

Dear Hugh Jevons: It becomes necessary that you should step in to help me a second time—and a last time—in my life. I have not forgotten how you helped me before. You were a solid man to me then, and it is proof enough I believe you a solid man still that I have picked upon you to be custodian of my confidences now that I can no longer hold them myself. You will understand what I mean, as you read on.

In the first place, my number is up. I see death approaching as clearly as you look to the rise of tomorrow's sun. But I do not intend that my secret shall die with me. Some other human being must carry on the knowledge I have gained during the past year, for I feel there is more in my experience than mere marvel and mystery and adventure. I feel, I *know*, that there is a great purpose behind it all; that the Great Artificer who planted us, bickering insects, upon this planet never willed that such truths as I have unearthed should sink back into oblivion after a man of the real, outer world has penetrated to them—and sacrificed his life in the doing. It wouldn't square with my idea of the Great Artificer.

Not for your scholarship or your knowledge of the East have I chosen you to be legatee of my secrets—you would hardly flatter yourself that far. I was under no illusion as to your qualifications for partnering me before—but you partnered me handsomely, for all that. You were ready to listen to my theories at a time when men with far bigger pretensions pooh-poohed them; you were intelligent enough to let my brains do duty for the pair of us.

The orthodox oriental societies were not always that intelligent. For them, those pretty stones we picked out from under the ruin of Lao Tien Ssu would be there now, and the book which is my chief claim to be remembered would languish still in manuscript. I must have told you that was how I utilized the bulk of my share in the loot? Anyway, it was. *You* helped me to the ownerless gems, comrade. You had a hand in financing "Treasure of Asia." You, therefore, have assisted materially in throwing light on this dim-lit quarter of the globe. I've known respected God-fearing professional orientalists who couldn't say as much—without a lie.

Now I claim a bigger service of you. I've instructed my lawyers to send you this packet only after my death. It was a pretty blistering oath I collected from the senior partner of the firm, and I think he'll respect it. What I want done with the manuscript is another story. I will be perfectly frank with you. I consider it to be a dangerous thing—unless rightfully used. You wouldn't carry fulminate of mercury about in your pocket, would you? Well, I regard this manuscript as more deadly than fulminate of mercury. I solemnly assure you that I believe death began to close in upon me from the moment I resolved to make a record of the events with which this manuscript deals. It sounds fantastic, does it not? Perhaps you will alter your opinion as you read on.

But, you may ask, since I am convinced I am to die in any event, why do I not publish the manuscript now? I answer that it is in the nature of an act of submission. I swore to keep these matters secret from the world. In intention, I broke my oath. The punishment at once gathered over my head. I acquiesce in the justice of it. It is the difference between the criminal who confesses on the scaffold and the coward who professes innocence to the end, between dying contrite and dying in revolt. I have chosen the former course. It still sounds wild and incredible? That view, too, I think you will come to abandon.

But, you say again, was it a comradely act to pass the narrative on to you? I reply, not uncomradely. The detonator is harmless enough in a situation where it cannot be touched off. So with this manuscript. I am convinced, nay, certain, that no danger threatens you so long as you hold the secret close in your own bosom. It is no blind unreasoning malignance we have to deal with, but a sentient power, and as I now see, a just one, meting out punishment only where there is guilt. I have been guilty: therefore I am doomed.

You, so long as you keep the secret, are guiltless: you will be unharmed. Why, then, have I not destroyed the manuscript and with it the risk of betrayal? Because, as I have

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written before, I do not believe it was intended that the secret should perish utterly for the outer world. Perhaps, in years to come, the powers which forbade me to reveal these matters will lift the veto. Should that occur, have no doubt that they will find means to convey their will to you, they, who have found no difficulty in making known to me, over a distance of untold miles, that I must die.

Till then, comrade, lock this secret in the innermost recesses of your soul. Hold the manuscript safe. Leave nothing to chance. Deposit it under the seal with your bankers or your lawyers, with instructions that nothing is to be done with it without your express command, and that should you die without giving that command, the package is to be destroyed unopened. For I say again that there is doom in it, a doom which I now see approach me as clearly as I see from the window of this hotel the big, butt-ended freighters swinging on the tide of Whangpu River.

As to the manuscript, every word in it is as true as our finite human brains can know aught to be true. Nothing is written but what I have seen with my own eyes or heard with my own ears. The narrative will amaze you, doubtless, but I give you credit for the intelligence not to meet it with a stupid unreasoning denial. Let me appeal to you to put aside all your preconceived notions as to what is and what is not in this queer, half-known quarter of the earth. Above all, banish from your mind the least shadow of suspicion that I am either mad or insincere. I am as sane as you are, and in dead earnest.

Consider the probabilities. Is it for one instant to be supposed that I, who see death hard upon me, should write a monstrous hoax? That I, who came East when I was little more than a boy and have given my whole working life to the search for hard facts regarding the East, should now fritter my last hours on mere romance of the imagination? That I, who have boldly stated the truth as I found it, even though this often exposed me to hostility and derision from the orthodox, timid-minded scholars of this land, should abandon truth for falsehood at a moment when I am due to appear before a Higher Tribunal which knows nothing but eternal truth?

I take my leave of you with every warm wish for your happiness. I am, I may say, without kin of my own, and at about the time this package arrives you will receive from the same firm of lawyers a notification that I have named you my heir to such small parcels of this world's goods as I possess. The property consists almost wholly of personal effects, trophies, curios—some of them valuable, by the way—and the copyright of my published works. The more precious part of my belongings goes with this letter.

I offer it to you not as proof of the truth of my narrative, but as a gift made in good fellowship to a comrade who risked his life with me in a quest few men in the world would have taken on. But there is a condition attaching to the legacy. I charge you that if at any future date it becomes possible, in the manner I have hinted, for you to publish this manuscript, you should do so, using what may be necessary of the proceeds from sale of the contents of the accompanying box. Even should you print the narrative on gold leaf and bind it in choicest silk, there will still be left money enough to maintain you in luxury to the end of your days.

Goodbye.

Ronald Mirlees, known as Ran Mirlees, Master of Arts in the University of Edinburgh, Scotland, and now resident in the Marco Polo Hotel, Shanghai, China, this first day of January in the year of Our Lord 19—.

Enclosed in the package was a heavy skin box, about eight inches square by four high. I opened this with a small key hanging by silk thread from the lid, and at once sat back in my chair gasping and blinking with astonishment. The casket was full to the brim with large uncut diamonds, not one of them smaller than a marble and all apparently of very fine quality. My skill in gems was not professional, but I could see at a glance that these stones must be worth many thousands of pounds sterling; and if I had been curious to read Mirlees' manuscript before, now my eagerness was whipped to the point of fever. I tore off the wrappings from the close-written quarto sheets and began to peruse them.

The house boy came in with a note from Randegger (my partner at the office) inquiring rather acidly if I was ill. I looked up at the clock. It was two in the afternoon. I then remembered that the boy had entered the room some time before but that I had ordered him out without hearing what he had to say. That must have been at tiffin time: I had been reading for four hours solid, lost to all else in the world. I sent a note to Randegger pleading urgent private affairs, and resumed the reading of Mirlees' narrative. It was dark before I had finished, for the manuscript, though not of an inordinate length, was written, till quite near the end, in Mirlees' crabbed, scholarly, meticulously fashioned hand, and did not admit of a rapid perusal. Nor was the subject matter of a sort to encourage skipping. As I worked from phase to phase of the amazing story it seemed to me that never before in the history of written words could so strange, so incredi-

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ble, yet withal so convincing a record of events nave been placed on paper.

Time after time I flung down the manuscript almost in anger—only to pick it up a moment later and find the precise spot where I had left off. Now I felt that I was in the grip of a tale of such force as only the hallmark of truth can give, now I seemed to be listening to the ingenious but wild fancies of a madman. Here was human experience set at naught, the history which has passed as certainty for two thousand years brusquely picked up and thrown down gutted like cod under the fishmonger's knife—and on what evidence? The statements of one man, unsupported by a single witness. It was monstrous, unthinkable!

No sane person could have offered such testimony, It is a commonplace saying that genius may come near to insanity. Mirlees possessed the brilliant, bold, penetrating type of intellect which we are in the habit of calling genius—that I had felt during my previous encounter with him. Surely towards these his last days his brain had given way, and this screed I was now perusing was the reflection not of his observations and experience but of the fancies of an unbalanced mind?

I came to the end of the manuscript and laid it down with a great wave of pity for the dead man. As I did so, once more there caught my eye the box of uncut diamonds, their brilliancy darting irrepressibly through the crust of impurities that overlaid them. At least the writer had vouchsafed some solid support for his statements, though he had appealed to me not to regard the gems as such, or even to require proof beyond his own written words.

Of the circumstances under which this amazing record is now laid before the world I have written later. Of the truth and sanity, or otherwise, of Mirlees' assertions, it shall be left to the reader to judge.

Here, then, follows the narrative of Ronald Mirlees, exactly transcribed from his own manuscript which I received from the dead man's lawyers more than thirteen years ago.

CHAPTER I

THE AFFAIR OF THE OPIUM HELL

MY NAME is Ronald Mirlees, or Ran Mirlees as I have usually signed myself under those contributions to the learned press of the East by which I have chiefly picked up a living, and through which I am known to a good deal wider circle of readers than ever I possessed friends. I was born thirty-six years ago, son of a schoolmaster, on the fringes of Paisley, in Scotland. After completing my schooling in that town and my course at the University of Edinburgh, where I took the degree of Master of Arts, I came to the East, a region of the globe which had deeply fascinated me from boyhood up.

Arrived here, I at once plunged into the study of Eastern languages and history and religion which I had begun at Home, earning my bread the while by odd jobs of journalism—though not always the brand of journalism I should have chosen if I hadn't been starving when I did it. Those early days were about the most desperately thin period of a life which has never run to fat. Later on my name got to be better known, and my pen better paid, and I might in time have aspired to a sedate competence if I had been able to purvey the kind of orientology the public expects. Unfortunately, I wasn't. That sort of orientology I found to be too full of elementary error, too much given to vague and shallow report compiled in the study with the help of other men's books, to commend itself to me.

I soon saw that such things as native life and the native point of view couldn't be soundly written about by any man who had not gone *fantee* himself, for the information gets very distorted even when it comes through the medium of servants and hired teachers and the tame type of native who prides himself on his foreign friends. The art of living "native" was about the first I set myself to learn when I came to the country, and ever afterwards, when I wanted facts, I dived into the raw mass of yellow humanity to get those facts direct, and I passed them on exactly as they had come to me. It was good orientology, but bad policy for a penniless journalist largely dependent on the favor of his fellow scholars to get work at all. I became an "outsider", a blackleg, in more or less perpetual bad odor. It was annoying, naturally, for the accepted authorities to have certain of their pet misstatements, which had been handed down from generation to generation after being blindly cribbed in the first place from the writings of some sinologue long dead, abruptly exploded by that one real, first-hand, naked fact I had collected from the folk of the Far East in person.

The wider my knowledge and experience grew, the more of these venerable bearded errors I found it necessary to kill off, and my popularity in learned circles steadily dwindled. The culminating point came when I published my best known and least conciliatory work under the title of "Treasure of Asia."

Arrangements to publish "Treasure of Asia" had confined me a good deal to the European

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quarter of Shanghai, a city for which I never harbored any great love, and I felt once more the stirrings that have so often driven me up country to the wild interior. I wanted to see life raw and naked again, to wrestle another fall with those yet unprobed mysteries of the East that have always held such a profound, half-grim fascination for me. My wife had died several years before, and with her passed out the one tie that could have reconciled me to fixture in one humdrum existence; since her death, indeed, I'd been a planet with a zigzag orbit, halted only by shortage of funds—and not always by that.

I come now to my last adventure, beside which whatever I had met before in the way of queer experience—and my life has embraced some very queer experience—seems tameness itself: an adventure surely stranger and wilder than ever fell to the lot of another man living or dead. Let me say at the starting out that this narrative which follows is literally true from beginning to end. It may, if ever it sees the light of day, be disbelieved; it may even be laughed down as the vaporings of a lunatic. That will not detract one jot from its truth. If I have dwelt at length on my previous record, it is only for the purpose of making my real position clear, and letting any reader of this narrative see that if I have been regarded in the past as no true authority on oriental matters, that was not because of my failure to write facts about the East, but of my resolute refusal to perpetuate accepted errors. Let this suffice for the present. Later on the time must come when wider knowledge and exacter exploration will vindicate my assertions up to the hilt.

* * *

It was a hot, moist, stifling evening of May. A dun haze lay heavy over the river, where native junks and sampans and steam tugs were churning the oily water into an evil-smelling froth the color of coffee. Seldom had the city of Shanghai so revolted me, and as I strolled along the crowded Bund I reflected that I would give a king's ransom—if I had it—to get out into open country or open sea and away from this strident, feverish, dollar-grubbing prison on Whangpu River.

My footsteps led me to the side of Soochow Creek, across the bridge and northward and eastward, beyond the banks and wharves and godowns, into a locality I remembered from having visited before, though I don't suppose I could have mapped it with any pretension to accuracy. Nor did I pay great heed to my direction, for I was weary, washed out with boredom and the sickening, stewy heat, and walked slowly and aimlessly. In time I found myself penetrating deeper and deeper into a dense warren of native dives, cranky houses bulging out over the grimy, narrow, snaking, flagged lanes and leaning one upon another this way or that, like a row of soused revellers arm in arm. I must have wandered some way through this maze, for it was now twilight, a twilight still farther deepened by the beetling houses and shop signs in Chinese character which often hung so thick as to blot out entirely the twisting riband of sky overhead. Then I came to that blind alley which, though I little dreamed it then, was to prove the threshold of the biggest and queerest adventure of my life.

Though hazy on a point of geography, I knew something of this neighborhood, with its opium-dens and gambling hells, and I hesitated some minutes before advancing. That narrow cut seemed to leave the whole world all behind it. I was glad I had brought my revolver in the pocket of my pongees.

The end of the alley was completely blocked by a double folding door, with boss-shaped brass lock of native pattern. On this portal I knocked. There was no reply. Then I tried the "opium-den" rat-tat, a bit of special knowledge I had often found effective in the past. Still the door remained close shut; but for certain muffled sounds of revelry beyond it I should have concluded there was nobody to answer my summons. At last, however, one half of the door came a few inches ajar, and a puckered yellow face showed in the chink. Here, too, there seemed an odd hint of the fatalistic. I'd never been to this den before, yet I recognized the doorkeeper at once—perhaps from some former visit to a dive of a similar kind. The doorkeeper likewise recognized me, and after some hesitation allowed me to enter.

There was a small porch behind the door, plunged in pitch dark, through which we passed into the den itself. It was of the usual pattern for places of the sort, but a good deal larger, and had also about it palpable signs of foreign influence. The walls were lined with squalid-looking couches, where natives in all degrees of robustness or decrepitude reclined drowsily over their opium pipes, but the nave of the dim-lit hall was dotted here and there with ramshackle tables and chairs after the fashion of a European drinking hell, and at one end was, apparently, a low stage, now screened off by a silk curtain across which yellow dragons were chasing wisps of conventional whorled cloud.

Manifestly this half-breed den was wont to cater not so much for the unsophisticated native as for the sea-going, semi-Europeanized type, and for that queer underworld of foreign-

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ers of the beachcombing class. Hence the dramatic stage and the grotesquely incongruous restaurant tables, and the "firewater" which I saw—and smelled even above the sickly reek of opium—to be on sale in the place.

I sat down at one of the tables nearest the back of the hall, while a boy brought me tea and melon-pips. He had proposed fire-water first, but I thought not. The European who starts to swallow that unholy preparation may as well throw in his hand. After a while an eerie wailing of native violins rose from somewhere to one side of the stage, and the curtain was drawn crosswise, revealing a girl posed for the dance. She would have presented, to anybody enamoured of the type, an attractively exotic figure, her long brown-black hair flowing loose, her lithe limbs swaying to and fro with the evil grace of a snake, her oblique almond-shaped eyes half-closed. The dance was little more than a succession of postures, involved, elaborate, voluptuous; and having watched many exhibitions of the kind before, I was not a little weary of it by the end. This came in the middle of an unusually plaintive scrape of the fiddles; the girl broke off suddenly and sank to the stage in a tinkle of jewelry, amid grunts of *"Hao! Hao!"* from all quarters. Then the company resumed its pipes, and the grumble of talk that had slackened ever so slightly during the dance grew loud again.

There were several other performers on the primitive stage, but nothing that I could see of any novelty or interest, and I was sinking steadily deeper into boredom. I'd already made up my mind to clear out and look for adventure elsewhere, and was rising to do so, when there came under my eye the first sight to hold it that evening. By this time the room had filled up—though I could see no foreigner besides myself—and taken on a brisker air. Some few of the smokers, it is true, had dropped asleep and lay in queerly twisted attitudes across the side-couches, but others had come instead to the stage of exaltation. They sat up on the foot of the beds, drank from the chipped water jug which a boy was carrying round, and breathed in deeply, with that wild dilation of the eyes and glare of ecstasy of the opium fiend which always, though I have seen it often enough to get hardened, strikes me as such a loathsome distortion of the human countenance.

But it wasn't the opium smokers that had trapped my attention. What I was looking at was a table a little way from mine, where two Chinese sat in the most earnest conversation. You wouldn't have thought this dive, given over as it was to amusement of a sort and deviltry of a worse, was any manner of a place to do business in, but this pair appeared to think so, for there they sat whispering and nodding and wagging fingers at one another for all the world as if it were a question of dethroning the emperor. They were so placed that I had a profile view of both faces, and even by the bad light of the place I could see that one of these men was rather handsome, too, with that queer approach to the European type of beauty which will crop out now and again among well-bred Chinese; whereas the other was of such a repellent ugliness as not even I, in all my wanderings over the myriad-faced Land of Han, had ever seen exceeded or even equalled.

I watched this ill-assorted couple slyly, and began to wonder what it could be that engaged them in such a deadly talk. They spoke in very low whispers, with their heads close together.

At this point the curtain drew back again from the stage and about half a dozen half-clad girls began a sort of choric dance together. The measure started lazily enough, but quickened bit by bit with the music, rising at last to such a pitch of frenzy that the whole stage was one blurred whirl of flying beads and naked brown limbs. This was clearly to be taken as the star show of the evening. Grunts of approbation came louder and more frequent on all sides. Even the couple I was watching looked up from their chin-wagging and stared at the odd, wild spectacle on the stage. At last, with a concerted leap high into the air, the dancers came to a halt and flung themselves down onto the boards in a sort of tableau; then the curtain was drawn amid loud barks of applause.

THE drawing of the curtain threw everything into gloom until lamps were brought in from somewhere behind the hall. It was in this short interval of twilight that the ugly Chinese made a sudden slight gesture, as if to somebody at the far side of the room. So unobstrusive was the movement that had I not been on the alert I should certainly not have noticed it at all. As it was, the handsome fellow looked to be totally unaware of anything wrong, for he plunged again into talk as earnest as ever, while his companion answered him with an air of unshaken determination. Then I realized the game. A third figure was edging nearer and nearer the two, and I saw that this man was carrying, half hidden in his ample sleeve, a stout, heavy bottle. The ugly Chinese, clearly, was talking to hold the attention of the handsome one while the accomplice approached him from behind—with intent there was no mistaking.

I called sharply to the prospective quarry,

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but too late. At this very instant the lamps were obscured for another act on the stage. The man with the bottle glided forward and aimed a savage blow at the good-looking Chinese. It fell on the back of his black skull-cap, with a horrible hollow crack, and the man went down like a log. In a flash the other had pounced upon him, tearing at his long robe as if to get at something in the inner folds.

I sprang onto the ugly Chink and flung him off his victim, then picked up the stunned man and backed towards the door with him in my arms; but the tables and the thick crowd were all against escape that way. Besides, the bottle man had edged round behind me, and there I stood, carrying a helpless stranger, midway between two of the ripest looking scoundrels in Asia. I saw that my one chance would be to get my back to the wall and hold on until I could attract help, if any, from outside. It was a slender hope, but the best that occurred to me at the moment.

I rushed my burden to one of the side couches and dropped him onto a sleeping opium smoker, who rolled to the floor with a curse. The next instant I was yelling at the top of my lungs, and the two Chinese were making at me from different directions. Luckily, my father had taught me as a boy the sovereign virtue of a straight left—a bit of education that has stood me in better stead than all he ever imparted out of his primers. I hit out, caught the nearest of my attackers on the point of his weedy chin, and sent him spinning back among the crowd. The other came on, and received a like dissuader from my right.

Neither blow was a true king hit, however, and neither Chinese was anything near knocked out—on the contrary, the setback only seemed to have whipped up all the venom in the pair of them, and there they crouched, spitting curses, amongst which I caught the repeated epithet of "foreign devil". This was disquieting. So far, the sense of the room seemed to be a sort of armed neutrality, but I knew that if this villainous partnership succeeded in inflaming popular feeling, I shouldn't last the minute out. I yelled again for the police, all I knew how.

The bottle man had dropped the bottle, and I caught the glint of a knife in his hand. I snatched out my revolver. I had intended to use this only in the last resort, but there was nothing else for it now. The fellow sprang at me with a hiss, and I distinctly remember how my slow, erring senses coupled that sound with the flash of the knife as it swept up in a

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half circle. I aimed as low as possible, but there is no guaranteeing results in an affair like that. I am much afraid the bullet took my gentleman in the entrails and put a period to his crimes there and then. He had his revenge, however. With the firing of that shot the sympathies of the room turned very definitely against me. There was an ugly movement in the crowd. I swept the front rank with my gun, and they drew back a little—only a little, but long enough to allow me to dash forward and snatch the knife out of the dead man's hand and get back to the couch by the wall.

The crowd resented this move. A howl of rage went up. Those in a position to know say the howling of an angry Chinese mob is the most terrible sound in this world, and I agree. The end couldn't be long coming. One rush, and I must be overwhelmed and meet such a handling as the mind would not picture. On they came. I fired into the crowd—two, three, four, five, six—and at the last report felt a sudden sharp sting in my wrist and heard the empty revolver clatter to the floor. Somebody had thrown a knife.

At this moment, when frankly my chances didn't look worth the hole in a copper coin, help came from a quarter the very least expected. The good-looking Chinese sat up, as if roused to life by the repeated shots. He stared about him for the bare fraction of a second, then leaped to his feet. And now followed the most astonishing phase of the whole fight. Darting to the nearest of the fallen, my new ally gripped him by the ankles, and with a miracle of strength I should never have dreamed possible in a man, jerked the limp body above his head and swung it round and round. Twice this terrible human club fell, and twice a swathe of men went down beneath it.

"This way," he muttered to me in the vernacular, dashing out into the room. The mob drew back, more from amazement than fear, leaving an irregular path between the tumbled chairs and tables. I followed close on my ally's heels. Now we gained a small door on the far side, to which he nodded. As I flung it open and dashed through I caught over my shoulder a glimpse of the human mace swinging aloft again. My companion had wheeled around, hurled the body at the nearest of the crowd who were already closing in behind us, and followed me through the open door, securing it after him.

Together we ran along a short dark corridor, thence out into the open air. The lane in which we found ourselves was surprisingly broad, and at the end of it, to my even greater astonishment, stood a small car, richly finished and built with an eye to speed. The engine throbbed into life and an instant later we had sprung up and were moving away from the scene of the fight. Our escape, from the moment when my ally recovered consciousness to the time we boarded the automobile, cannot have taken more than half a minute; and as I look back upon it, even after this lapse of months, the whole business seems like a swift, vivid dream.

I could see, over the folded hood of the car, a dim swirling mob of pursuers and hear their howling with still that high-pitched unmistakable note of murder in it. But within five minutes the last uneasy sounds of pursuit had died away.

THE Chinaman drove westward for some distance, into that part of the city where I had crossed the Soochow Creek several hours before. Then we turned south, and in a few moments were spinning down the broad, bright-lit Nanking Road, with its queer blend of Western paving with Eastern shops and their garishly carved and gilded fronts. Some way farther on we turned east once more into the fringes of the French Concession, and at last drew up at a compact bungalow.

We seemed to have been expected, for no sooner had the noise of our horn broken on the quiet night than I saw a wide wooden gate swing open, and my companion had driven the car straight into its garage. The gate was immediately closed. Nobody watching in the street a moment later would have had a notion of our arrival. There was no light whatever to be seen in the house.

The Chinaman jumped down, leading the way along a path hidden in shrubbery, into a side door of the bungalow. This opened on a long dark passage. My companion disappeared down this, leaving me in charge of the native servant who had opened the gate to us. Together we entered a small room richly furnished in Chinese style.

The boy left me for a moment, returning with hot water and lint and bandages for my wounded wrist, which I had roughly bound with a handkerchief. He made a swift workmanlike job of the stab—fortunately it had touched no big b l o o d — and withdrew, leaving me sitting in a wide silk-cushioned settee of blackwood.

The room, heavily shuttered, was lit by a hanging lamp of brass, worked into the form of a dragon, which didn't give a very brilliant light, but quite enough to show me my companion clearly when he returned a few minutes later. He was the same person, exactly, in externals, yet there was a strange change.

"Well, Mr. Ronald Mirlees!" he said.

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The words had been spoken in the perfect English of a well-bred man.

I could do nothing but sit back in my seat and gape stupidly, while he continued to look at me with an air of amusement.

"But how do you come to know my name?"

"Dear me," he replied, with a wonderfully winning laugh, "if such a well-known orientalist as yourself wants to visit that sort of den *incognito*, he must assume a character—like this." He took the long Chinese robe between his thumb and forefinger and gave it a shake. "But one moment," he continued, stepping to the side of the room and drawing a card from a case. "That's me."

I took the pasteboard slip from his carefully browned hands and read:

Mr. Saunders Philipson.

"Now," said Philipson, waving me back to my settee and taking a chair himself. "We are in an uncommonly nasty hole. That much is self-evident. Two or three of the men I saw on the floor of that den tonight looked as if they were never going to get up again, and the fellow I was obliged to use as a weapon of defence was certainly stone dead before I touched him. A melancholy business, no doubt, but I would sooner they than we."

"I emptied every chamber of my gun," I said. "And it was too near to miss. I don't know how many deaths there are among that crowd, but there are six wounds."

"Quite so. That means a most awkward investigation. Unless we take steps we may both find ourselves in a bad spot. You see the force of my reasoning?"

"Doesn't require much seeking. What do you suggest?"

"We must avoid appearing at that investigation."

"Lie low, you mean, till it blows over. If you can put me up here for a day or two—"

"Utterly hopeless," said Philipson. "There were men there who know me well. The car must have been recognized. You too, I believe, left a revolver behind. It will be simplicity itself to trace the pair of us."

"Then let's go to the police and make a clean breast of it. After all, you were the first attacked."

"I was; but the evidence will lie heavily the other way. Those people have their story composed and rehearsed by now, backed by a dozen provably independent witnesses. Depend upon it. They will swear we provoked a quarrel, and we ourselves must admit that we did the killing, without a casualty on our side. It would look black against us even in a consular court."

I had to admit that the pronounced likelihood of this notion had already struck me.

"Moreover," he continued, eyeing me closely, "I have the very strongest reasons for not wishing my dealings with that gang to come out."

"What are we to do, then?"

"Cut. We must be out of this house and away inside ten minutes," said Saunders Philipson with decision.

"H'm. If they can set the police after us they can have the stations watched."

"No need to depart by rail. Fortunately there is the river. We are near it here. I have my own launch moored off the French Bund. In half an hour I will undertake to get you well on your way to Wusung, and after that, barring typhoons, we can please ourselves, up coast or down."

I shall have to say it before long, and I may as well say here that there was something about this man entirely new to my experience. I had been strangely attracted towards him even through a marvelously clever Chinese disguise, and the feeling was intensified tenfold now that I saw him as he really was. Before the week was out I had realized that he was long and away the most remarkable man I had ever met.

"We are going to be friends, I can feel," he said. "Now, we shall look less suspicious if we are both in the same costume, and though few would believe it, I can turn you into a Chinaman quicker than I can get myself back into a European."

I followed him along the passage to a little chamber curiously like the dressing room of a theatre, and there, with the help of Philipson and his boy and a pile of native clothes and dyes and artificial pigtails, I was soon a presentable Celestial.

"Not your first appearance in this rôle, Mirlees?" Philipson said.

"Not by miles," I replied, frogging up the grey *maokuâ* at my left shoulder. "Fan, pipe—I think that's everything."

IN A FEW moments Philipson had put back the native touches on his own exterior, two ricshas appeared at the door as if from nowhere, and we were whirling off towards the French Bund. When we came to the water's edge there were two natives lounging on the wharf. They gave no sign that they had even seen us arrive, but for all that, I noticed, when I looked back from the sampan in which we were pulling out to the mooring place of the launch, that both these loafers had disappeared.

I heard Philipson laugh softly to himself. "You saw that, Mirlees?" he said. "Those fel-

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lows have gone back to report our presence."

"But *they* couldn't know anything about the dust-up of tonight?"

"Not yet, perhaps, but they very soon will. And our friends of the opium-den will know that we have left by the launch, which those two had been detailed to watch."

"Perhaps I could help better, Philipson," I said, "if I knew exactly what we *are* up against."

"An organization, Mirlees," he replied. "A large and powerful and highly unscrupulous one, too, I fear. But the story is a long one, and unless I am much mistaken, our time for the next hour or so is going to be fully occupied with more pressing matters."

On board the launch, a long clean-lined craft, and, as I knew before I'd been two minutes in her, of great engine power, we found a native on guard. The fellow challenged us sharply as our sampan drew near. Philipson's answer was to order him to start up and cast off moorings; we boarded the launch, paid the sampan man, and a moment later had swung away down stream without lights. The engine purred gently and musically, but a big arrowhead of foam that lay out at once from our bow proved we were moving fast, if quietly.

"Luckily," remarked Philipson, "I had anticipated some such little upset as this. The launch has been held ready day and night for the past week, and I have no doubt Ah Sing at least is glad matters have come to a head. Eh, Ah Sing?"

The native engineer looked back from his specklessly tended charge.

"Engine b'long all-same numbah one plopah," he said. "Plenty sparkum-juice hab got. Can go Canton if'm likee."

Philipson took the tiller and steered with a coolness and dash that reminded me forcibly of his driving. Also he seemed to be gifted with the eyes of a cat. We shot in amongst barges, sampans, junks, tugs, steamers—all the medley of Eastern and Western craft that crowd the winding Whangpu River—some of them lighted, others a mere blotch of deeper black against the dark stream; some of which we missed by inches, others literally scraped with our streaks. As we rounded the curve and headed eastward I noticed that Philipson had his eyes fixed on the north bank in a long tense stare.

"Telephones," he said, shortly.

"Eh? Oh, you mean—"

"That the gentlemen who were watching this launch have probably telephoned to the headquarters of the gang, which are, I believe, not far from that den where we had such an unpleasant experience tonight."

We had come to a pool where the stream broadens greatly and is deep enough to float ocean-going ships close inshore. We saw several fast at their wharves on the south side. The north bank was crusted thick with native shipping, and between shore lights and lights afloat the river here was thrown into a wan, treacherous illumination. I had followed Philipson's stare with my eyes: now I saw what he was looking at. Something swift and black had detached itself from the mass and was shooting out across our course.

"Ah Sing—engine," said Philipson quietly. "Mirlees, take the tiller. Bring us as near them as you dare, but for God's sake do not give us a leak, or we are done. Here is a revolver. Remember, though, we must not risk the noise of shots unless we are very hard pressed."

I did as I was bid, while Philipson himself took the boathook and crawled forward, where he crouched low on our decked-in bow. Soon I saw the wisdom of his plan. It was typical of the man. His mind always seemed to be made up the instant a fresh problem presented itself, and his policy was usually a sudden original move, bold to the point of impudence. On this occasion it met with brilliant success. There were at least five men on the other launch, against our three, and had we merely tried to dodge them, it's likely we should have been grappled, boarded, and overpowered, or at least forced to use firearms and thus bring out the river police. As it was, the very unexpectedness of our attack threw the enemy into confusion and enabled us to get clean away, so that watchers on shore could hardly have been aware of the little drama that was being played in midstream. What actually happened is this.

I ran our boat straight at the other, then at the last moment put the helm hard down. A figure had sprung up in the bows of the enemy craft, clearly intending to leap aboard of us, but he had reckoned without Philipson and his boathook. Philipson also sprang to his feet, caught the opposing bow-man full in the stomach, and hurled him backwards into the river. There were the odds evened by one at the very outset. The boats came together with a loud scraping clatter, and I saw two natives seize our gunwale while a third, erect behind them, drew back for a leap. Ah Sing pluckily gripped one man by the throat and dragged him on to our boat, where the pair tumbled into the well and rolled over and over, fighting like terriers.

I was holding revolver and tiller in my right hand. With my left I struck out, caught the second gunwale man between the eyes and had the satisfaction of seeing him stagger back,

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half overturning the man behind him. The check was only momentary, however, for the fellow was up and inboard of us before I could strike again. I saw a short club raised above my head, and threw up my left arm in defence, but I never felt the blow fall. The man was suddenly snatched away from in front of me. Philipson, having finished his business in the bows, had rushed aft and seized my attacker by the waist and lifted him off his feet as if he had been a child. Then for the second time that evening I witnessed an exhibition of this man's superhuman strength. He gave the body a sudden swing and hurled it back on to the other boat with such terrific force that the fellow overshot the mark altogether, sweeping one of his comrades overboard with him.

Next, pretty much as if he had been playing skittles, Mr. Saunders Philipson stooped into the well, where Ah Sing had finally got a strangle hold on *his* antagonist, detached the two men, picked our enemy up and threw him far out into the stream, where his sudden yell was cut short in a great splash. The whole thing was over in a few seconds, most of the enemy in the water, and the one native left aboard of their boat unable to do more than throttle his engine and back and circle to pick up the men overboard. We had broken away, and shot downstream with a good start. Our leader put back the boathook in the rack under our gunwale and briefly inquired if anybody was hurt.

Ah Sing rubbed his ear with a hand that came away bloodstained from it.

"Dat piecee men," he observed judicially, "plenty stlong toosum-box hab got. Him muchee bitum!"

"I will dress that for you in a minute, Ah Sing," said Philipson gravely. "Give me the tiller, Mirlees. We are by no means out of the wood. Those fellows may go ashore and telephone Wusung to have a police boat waiting for us. Or they may—yes, by Jove, they are!"

I peered out astern, straining my ears. It was true. The other launch was coming swiftly downstream in our wake.

"You think they can catch us?" I said.

"You saw for yourself the speed of that boat when she came out from the bank. I know her of old. The one thing on the river that can beat her is our own, and that not by a great deal. With the twist of the river I question if we shall have the advantage at all."

He dived forward through the cabin and returned with a stout square board, which, with the help of Ah Sing, he wedged firmly athwart-ship behind our engine.

"Bullets," he explained. "It may take the sting off them, at least, and save us from getting winged. They will not dare to fire on this part of the river, for fear of bringing the police about their ears—it is obvious they do not want that any more than we do. But when we come to the empty reaches lower down they may not be so squeamish. You know the river, Mirlees?"

"Pretty well."

"Right. It is half ebb now. We draw barely two feet. Do not be afraid to go inside the beacons if there is a good cut-off to be effected. I had better dress Ah Sing's ear while I have the chance. Come along, my faithful fellow."

I SAT well down to the steering of that boat out of Whangpu River. It was the reverse of a pleasure. We were soon come to the deserted reaches Philipson had spoken about, and I wondered how long it would be before the boat behind began to shoot. I could hear the hum of their engine above ours—they were clearly gaining on us. The frequent bends were robbing us of our advantage of superior speed, and steer straight as I might I couldn't prevent it. Many times have I cursed the snakiness of Whangpu River when crawling up it in steamers and impatient to be at the end of a voyage, but never had I cursed it as I did that night.

Philipson's head appeared through the low doorway as he crept aft. At the same instant a sharp crack rang out behind, and a long white streak flashed on to the inside of our gunwhale. Philipson bobbed back: for one fearful moment I thought he was hit. But it wasn't that. He reappeared with a Winchester rifle.

"This must be kept down, Mirlees," he said, "or at least replied to. Crouch when I fire—the flash will give them a good aiming point."

He laid the barrel across our gunwale, which, so smoothly were the engines running, made a fair rest, and fired. There was no result beyond that two shots came from the other boat and we heard a bullet sing over our heads.

"They too, it seems," said Mr. Saunders Philipson deliberatively, "have fallen into the error of aiming high. Now the great thing in life," he observed as he reloaded, "is to . . . be wise . from our failures . . . so!"

As a vindication of Philipson's philosophy it was immense, though I was a good deal too scared to appreciate philosophy at the time. It isn't pleasant to be pot-shotted, even in the vague light of night, particularly when, apart from the risk to our own skins, one unlucky bullet might have ruined our engine or our hull and left us at the mercy of a shipload

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of bloodthirsty pirates. There was a shriek of pain from behind us, followed by furious yells, and the firing held off.

"That has balanced the account for the time being," said Philipson, resuming the tiller himself. "But I have a horror of bloodshed. If I can possibly get away without firing another shot you may trust me to do so."

He was equal to his word. He handled that superb boat in a way that made my best efforts look childish, and though after a while our pursuers loosed off at us again, we were drawing too far ahead for the gunning to be deadly. The stream continues to wind until it meets the sea, but under Philipson's hand our course couldn't have been far short of a straight line; curve after curve he sheared away with consummate skill, as if he could not only see in the dark but sense the depth of water under us; and though once we did plough mud with our keel, the check was no more than momentary, and we had forged over into deep water again. Once, too, we burst clean through a string of lighters dropping down on the tide blind as ourselves, and I heard their towrope rattle sharply along the roof of our cabin as we shot under it.

At last we came abreast of the junk fleet, you can generally count on finding anchored at the mouth of the river. Beyond that, open sea and safety. Thanks to Philipson's brilliant boatcraft we had drawn so far ahead of the other launch that the noise of her engine was indistinguishable from ours, and I should have reckoned that with one good spurt we might now show our enemies a clean pair of heels. Much to my surprise, Philipson ordered Ah Sing to throttle down to half speed.

"It is risky, admittedly," he said, "but it will be safer in the long run."

A hoarse shout of triumph announced that the other launch had sighted us: They came on cock-a-hoop, gaining fast and firing as they came. Philipson now opened our throttle bit by bit, and we drew away, heading southeast. In five minutes our speed was at full again, in fifteen the sounds of pursuit were dying in the distance, until we could hear them no longer. My companion now took a sharp turn, doubling back northeast for a minute or two, then shut off our engine altogether; and there we lay, rising and falling gently on the dark swell of the outer sea.

"You know where we are, Mirlees?" said Philipson suddenly.

"I should say off the south point of the old Quarantine Island," I replied.

"Exactly. And where do you suppose the other boat is?"

"God knows. But what are we hanging about here for?"

"In order to give our pursuers a good lead on their totally false scent. As soon as they are well past we will get along. What were they to suppose when I allowed them to view us making for the south end of the island? Obviously that we intended to go down coast—Ningpo, I fancy, is the port that will occur to them, as there is no likelihood of weather. They will pursue for some way on the chance of our petrol giving out. Then, when they find they do not pick up the sound of us again, they will assume we are clear away south. They will return at once to headquarters and warn Ningpo by telegraph—they have agents there, never fear. Meanwhile, it behooves us to select some other destination."

"Where d'you propose?"

"What do you say to Nanking?"

"That must be a day's run, even at the best pace we can screw out of her."

"Why not? It is a huge straggling city with miles of country within its walls. It offers every facility for a sudden departure by rail or water, should we have warning of pursuit. The police will hardly look for us there, since the only people in a position to give information regarding our movements will be of opinion—for the time at least—that we are down coast.

"You, should you find that the shooting affray has blown over, may return to Shanghai by train at any time you like. I would advise you not to be in a hurry, though. I am afraid, Mirlees, that by your magnanimous rescue of me tonight you have made yourself obnoxious to some of the most dangerous people in Asia. Were you to return to Shanghai now, I frankly could not promise you a peaceful life—or for that matter life at all."

It wasn't a particularly comforting argument, but it struck me as being sound. "Nanking be it then," I said. "We'll see to the future later."

"And a wise decision, in my view," said Philipson cheerfully, opening the throttle and turning the boat's head north.

We skirted the Quarantine Island on its seaward shore, then headed west for the estuary of Yangtze River. Philipson steered by the stars and checked his course roughly by a pocket compass, but he would have needed to be a pretty lubberly navigator to miss that enormous mark. Suddenly he looked up.

"Forgive me, Mirlees," he said. "The rush of events has caused me to forget my duties as host. Just go into the cabin and help yourself to a meal. Ah Sing will give you everything you want."

Now ravenously hungry, I didn't wait for a second invitation. The cabin of the launch I found to be a surprisingly roomy apartment,

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with a handy collapsible table amidships and broad lockers lining the sides. Ah Sing was evidently schooled to do more than run engines, for he had put up a capital collation of fresh cold meats and salad and white wine, laid out amongst spotless napery and dainty table furniture. In the roof of the cabin there was an electric globe which Ah Sing switched on after carefully shutting the after door, and I noticed mattresses and sheets and pillows rolled up on the ends of the lockers against bedtime. Altogether, this launch would have been a cosy home for a holiday, let alone a craft to run for your life in. I fell to, ate like a savage, then put on a pipe and went aft to relieve Philipson at the tiller.

All night we sped up into that greatest of China's waterways, the three of us standing successive tricks of two hours each, and by daybreak we had pierced the estuary to a point where the shores—a green-brown line low down on either bow—began to be visible again. Mile after mile we flung behind us; more and more we seemed to be in a river rather than a sea. As the vast estuary narrowed, so all the divergent tracks of up-river traffic drew in together; now we passed within hail of an occasional steamer, and before long saw away to starboard the eternal procession of junks as they hugged the north shore to avoid the down-rolling volume of the stream. Philipson's knowledge of the river seemed to be exact to the last detail; many of the shore villages he named as we swept past were quite unknown to me, though I recognized the Treaty Port of Chinkiang on our starboard bow early in the afternoon, and wanted no telling when, at the fall of dusk, we drew near the end of our long stage.

Well throttled down, we crept past Nanking Bund, giving it a wide berth, then headed straight in for a creek Philipson had chosen as being secluded enough for our business. Here we halted in midstream while the pair of us changed into European clothes, and gently paddled the launch inshore. You couldn't have hit on a better place for a furtive landing. There was a queer old inn, big, rambling, well tucked away, with its garden running down to the willow-shrouded bank, and water enough in the creek to allow of our putting the launch right in, so that we could step from the cambered roof of her cabin on to the grey lichened garden wall. We gave out to the native proprietress that we were merchants downstream from Hankow on a vacation, and engaged a bedroom each—Ah Sing would sleep on board—and a sitting room in the wing of the building overlooking the water; and there, after we had fed, Philipson pushed a box of cigarettes towards me and sat back in his chair.

"I owe you an apology, Mirlees," he began with a strangely serious air.

"What on earth for?"

"I am afraid I have misled you."

He sprang up, glided to the door as noiselessly as a cat, and flung it open. I had heard nothing myself, but I now caught a glimpse of the lady of the house withdrawing, feather dust-whisk in hand, to the far end of the landing.

"Note one," muttered Philipson, closing the door and resuming his seat. "That woman needs watching. But, as I was saying, I fear I have not been altogether frank. I led you to suppose that I was coming here to escape the consequences of our little brawl last night. That was only partly true. This Nanking journey is only the first stage of a much longer one I am making—so long that the distance would probably surprise you."

"H'm. *How* long?"

"Only time can measure the exact length," said Saunders Philipson, "but I should estimate it at nearer three thousand miles than two."

CHAPTER II

THE STRANGE EPISODE AT NANKING

THE match I had struck to light my cigarette remained burning in my fingers till it scorched them. I was waiting for Philipson to amplify that last disclosure, but he appeared to be thinking of something else; he had thrown back his head and was listening intently.

"Not a word now," he whispered.

There was a knock on the door, and the innkeeper entered, laid four bottles and two glasses on the table between us, and withdrew with that queer bent-kneed bounce which natives use for a bow.

"Fortunately," said Philipson, "this inn has been patronized by foreigners in the past, for whom the woman keeps a cellar. When we arrived it was almost my first concern to explore it and take stock. This is not a vintage claret, I am afraid, but it was the best quality I could find."

"You've made up for it in quantity, anyway," I put in.

Philipson smiled. "Have no fear," he said. "I fully understand that the burden of consumption will rest upon me. It is, I may say, a habit of mine to drink freely, and that of the best obtainable, on all occasions. Nothing gives me greater pleasure than to drink large quantities of good wine."

I thought this was a pretty naïve assertion

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for a man to make, but Philipson seemed quite unconscious of anything odd about the remark he had made. He poured out two glasses, pledged me politely, and continued to sip with zest all the time he was talking. I fully expected to see him get soused, but, far from that, beyond causing him to speak with a little deeper earnestness, the wine left Saunders Philipson entirely unaffected. His speech remained clear, with a sort of musical, incisive clearness it always had, and the clarity with which he unfolded his tale grew, if anything, as the night advanced.

"You are, I understand, pretty hard up at present, Mirlees?" he began, coolly.

"That's so," I replied, "but I don't know how you came to understand it."

"Do not trouble to inquire. I know many things about many people that would surprise them." And with that he began to prove it, quoting facts from my career since I had come East that I had thought unknown to anybody but Ronald Mirlees.

"So you see," he concluded, with a businesslike pull at his glass, "I have a fairly general idea of your status and antecedents. But it was only last night I found out about you the fact that really concerns me."

"What was that?"

"That you are a comrade to be relied upon," he said with the sincerest and most matter-of-fact air in the world," and that you are free from any absurd prejudice against the Asiatic as such."

"What makes you think that?"

"Your actions have proved that you, at least, do not consider him less worthy of consideration than a European. How many white men would have stepped in to see fair play for a Chinese as you did last night?"

"Perhaps not many."

"Very few indeed at the risk of their own lives. That fact alone would have singled you out in my mind as the ideal man to help me."

"What do you want me to do?"

"I want you to partner me in about the biggest adventure two men ever undertook."

"And you think I'd be more inclined to say yes because I'm on the rocks?"

Philipson sat back in his chair with a frank smile. *"Touché!"* he cried. "I ought not to have mentioned the state of your finances. If your being hard up disposes you to accept my offer, so much the better for me, but candidly, I was not leaning on that. What I want is breadth of mind, insight, sympathy, imagination. I can find any number of mere situation hunters, but the man of sympathy is rare. To meet that man at a moment when he is looking for an enterprise worthy of him I regard as a piece of unparalleled good fortune. After all, why should you scrape a livelihood writing for a public which can hardly understand you, leave alone appreciate, when you might be bidding for real fame with me?"

"You'd better let me have the story complete, Philipson," I said.

"With all my heart. You had never heard of me before last night, I take it?"

"Never."

"It is not greatly to be wondered at. I have spent many years in the East, but somehow the European centres never attracted me. Often I have lived native for long periods together, and beyond the consuls who have registered my name—though I never yet had to ask any other service of them—I do not suppose a dozen men in all China know me. Those who do, know me, I fear, only too well. The gentry who chased us last night in the launch are among that number. But to my story. At one time and another I have done much exploration in the interior. I have been in many places where I am convinced no white man has been before or since. The routes taken by travellers like Huc and Sven Hedin and the Prince of Orleans across the so-called 'unknown' regions of Tibet I would guarantee to follow blindfold. There is not much to be found up there except snow and ice and scenery—that is, at least, by people who are obliged to hurry straight across, on the stretch about their food supply all the while. If the climate and the nature of the country allowed one time to explore, I fancy a lot of strange things would turn up. I found something very strange indeed, but it was only by the merest accident."

"What was it?"

"An *obo*. You know what that is, of course?"

"A Tibetan prayer-mound, isn't it?"

"Exactly. They are to be found sometimes even in the uninhabited regions, having been erected by pilgrims crossing the heights. The *obo* consists of slabs of slate—which often lie ready to hand on the mountainsides—set up like a house of cards and inscribed all over with Tibetan characters. Most European explorers who come upon one of them for the first time imagine they have got hold of something noteworthy, but disappointment awaits them. That historic record they thought they had discovered turns out, on examination, to be no more than an endless reiteration of the Tibetan devotional formula, *Om Mane Padme Hum*—'O the Jewel of the Lotus.'"

"Yet you say it was something strange you found?"

"It was, indeed. At first, of course, I thought I had merely stumbled on one of those con-

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ventional monuments of piety, put up by some pilgrim on his way to Lhassa from the north and no more distinctive than a roadside crucifix in Italy. But then it struck me that this was well off the route that any pilgrim would be likely to take. There is no recognized track, of course, in those wild regions, but there are long grooves between the ranges of heights, and it is to these enormous gutters that the traveler keeps if he values his life. Even here progress is arduous in the extreme, for the surface is terribly rough even when free from ice-crusts, and many of the grooves run for hundred of miles at an altitude never less than sixteen thousand feet, with the accompaniment of constant hailstorms and snowstorms and terrific cold. The *obo* I found was not in one of these gutters. It stood on a small patch of level rock at the end of a pass, in the midst of a waste of rugged peaks looking for all the world like monstrous frozen waves of the sea.

"I saw beside the monument what appeared to be bleached sticks of wood; but I discovered my mistake as I came nearer. They were human bones—the skeleton of one man. Now thoroughly curious, I examined the inscription on the plaques of slate, and you may picture my excitement when I found it was not the usual text, but a longish legend scratched on the surface with, apparently, some sharp splinter of rock. I at once made an exact copy of the whole—no easy task, I may say, for the scratches had been very feebly made. At that time I did not know Tibetan well, but I knew enough to realize that this inscription had been written by the dead man—and not long before his death, to judge by the quavering way the letters were formed—for the purpose of leaving some message behind him. But what the message was, neither I nor any man of my party could fathom.

THAT expedition was the most disastrous I ever knew. We had abominable luck with the weather and everything else; snowstorms beleaguered us in the mountains so long that our supplies ran out, and we were reduced to living on steaks—raw for the most part—hacked from the ponies as they dropped dead one by one. My bearers treacherously deserted me, and when at last I, the only white man of the party, staggered down into the Tsaidam marsh country with one faithful usbeg who had accompanied me from Kashgar, the pair of us were much nearer dead than alive.

"My first move after getting back to civilization was to seek an interpretation of that legend. There are one or two European works on Tibetan, and I collected these and brushed up my knowledge of the language thoroughly; but after much hard study I found I was still unable to make sense of the inscription. The words were simple enough, but they seemed to resolve into phrases that would not come out by any ordinary method of translation. I could see far enough into the fog, however, to understand that this legend had been composed by a monk, and I assumed that the wording must be couched in some secret phraseology known only to Tibetan priesthood. Without special knowledge I could get no further. What was I to do? I dared not show the inscription to any Tibetan of my acquaintance, for I had already a shrewd suspicion that it contained facts I should desire to keep to myself.

"I bethought me of Lhassa, the headquarters of the Tibetan faith. Thither I went, posing as a Chinese convert anxious to qualify for monastic orders, and by virtue of a handsome solatium to the abbot of a big monastery I gained admittance. There I learned many strange things, Mirlees, but little that was of any use to me. Before long I became convinced that the peculiar form of language in which my legend had been written was not known at Lhassa. But the time I spent there was not wasted. I discovered the monastic meaning of two vitally important words in the inscription, which, translated into ordinary Tibetan, came out as 'Phagspa' and 'Shigatse.'

"That gave me the clue. The legend had been written by a monk of the monastery of Phagspa, in the city of Shigatse, and thither I must go for further enlightment. I went. Here I found far greater difficulty in obtaining admission, and it was only by heavy bribery I was able to do so at all. Also, I was obliged to take a vow to reside in that gloomy monastery forever. All went well for a while, and most hopefully for my quest. There *was* a secret form of language used by the inmates of that place, and it was not long before I began to acquire the elements of a vocabulary in it.

"Yet despite my utmost care, I could not remain there without arousing suspicion. From the questions I was obliged to ask, put them as artlessly as I might, the monks soon gathered that there was some ulterior motive in my coming, that I possessed a secret which they would very strongly desire to discover. I was watched night and day. The position became unbearable. At last one of the priests who had been detailed to instruct me in the religious observances of the place intruded on my privacy in a most exasperating fashion, and it ended in blows. Several other monks came to this fellow's aid. Well, you have seen me in a ruction, Mirlees. I seldom enter such an

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affair without leaving my mark on it. I knocked down two of the Tibetan clergy and threw a third against a great wodden pillar so violently that I fear he perished as a result. That was the end of my novitiate as a lama. I had to run, barely getting out with my life and the precious inscription, which I always carried sewn into my inner garment.

"I pass over my escape back into China, which was a ghastly experience enough, and took months of forced marches. But I had what I wanted. Arrived in Shanghai, I sat down to translate my legend, and found I could now piece it together without difficulty. And here is the translation."

Philipson took from his wallet a small folded slip, but paused before flatteing it out.

"I must have your solemn promise of secrecy, Mirlees," he said. "I have risked my neck twice for this little handful of words, and I do not choose to share it with any human soul besides yourself. Are you agreeable?"

I gave the assurance he wanted, and Philipson, leaning over the table, read in a clear whisper the following remarkable statement:

I, Sbrang Chikya Lama, being a priest of the holy brotherhood of Phagspa in the city of Shigatse, having now come to the end of this incarnation, do hereby declare:

That having strayed from the caravan in which I journeyed with others despatched by the Ocean Priest (Dalai Lama) from Lhassa to the Son of Heaven (Emperor of China) who holds sway in the north, I lost my way in the mountains, and was mad with the madness of high places (height-sickness) and came at last after many wanderings and grievous pains to the land of the beings of ghostly face, who dwell by the river of the white gems under skies where birds fly bigger than the children of men. And I descended into the valley which lies towards the setting sun, but having seen from afar the beings of ghostly face and becoming greatly afraid lest they, evil spirits, should enthral me to an evil *karma* (conduct of life) I fled swiftly into the mountains again ere they beheld me, and crossed again the great snows, hoping that in time I might meet pilgrims of our own faith who should relieve me of my distress. But I have seen no man, only the yak and the eternal snows, and being now blinded with the snows and ready to die for want of food and shelter, have written these words for warning lest any of the true brotherhood should stray from this spot towards the setting sun and should meet the devils of ghostly face and come to evil at their hands.

Now to the Jewel of the Lotus I commend my spirit and pray I may be born again in seemly shape and nearer to the blessed Nirvana (nothingness) which sets a period of life and death and rebirth.

PHILIPSON carefully folded and replaced the paper, and looked searchingly into my face.

"What do you make of that?" he said.

"About the queerest statement I ever came into contact with," I replied. "How do you interpret it yourself?"

"I take it to mean that somewhere amongst those tremendous ranges there is a valley of which the world so far knows nothing. Also that that valley is inhabited."

"By devils of ghostly face?"

"A white race might be called so by the writer of the legend."

"H'm. A pretty tall order, Philipson," I said. "Where could they have come from?"

"That remains for me to find out."

"But what can the fellow have meant by birds bigger than the children of men?"

"Possibly some great vulture or eagle which he had never seen in his own country. You must remember the poor wretch had been wandering alone over the mountains—for how long we don't know, and that he was starving and exhausted. No doubt to his fevered eyes the birds looked a good deal bigger than they really were."

"But the river of white gems?"

"Ah, there we come to a real difficulty. I have pondered that phrase for weeks together, and the only explanation I can think of is: the strayed priest struck a mountain stream, which he could see flowed down into the valley, and knelt beside it to drink. It must have been then that he noticed the white gems in the water, and the white gems, I take it, must have lain thick for him to notice them at all."

"What do you suppose they were?"

"There is only one kind of white gem that is found in the beds of streams, Mirlees—the diamond. That one fact ought to render this valley a highly attractive locality, though for my part I may say I intend to explore it quite independently of the hope of opening up a new diamond field."

"If there were diamonds there, isn't it likely the priest would have brought some away with him?"

"He may have done so. I noticed none near the skeleton, but then I was not looking for anything of the sort, and may easily have missed them. He may have dropped them during his retreat through the mountains. Likeliest of all, he may have been too terrified at the sight of the 'devils of ghostly face' to trouble about collecting gems."

I sat drumming my fingers on the table. It was a wild and fantastic enough story in all conscience, and they would be bold gamblers who staked much on its truth.

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"Well, what do you say?" I heard Philipson's crisp, keen voice.

"I see pretty enormous obstacles. In the first place, supposing you could find the place where the legend was written—"

"Never fear. I nearly lost my life on that trip, but I kept my head through it all. I made a large-scale plan of the neighborhood, and mapped every mile of my journey down country. I will guarantee to take you to that heap of slates direct—or as straight as the mountains permit."

"How is it, then, if the place is so easy to find, it's never been found and made known? I've trekked with the Tibetan caravans before now, many times, but never have I heard mention of such a monument."

"You hardly would. My *obo* is right off the track that caravans or even explorers would be likely to follow. Even if the heap of slates were found, that would not help in the least. I was determined that if there were any great discovery to be made beyond those mountains it should be mine only. As soon as I had copied the inscription I erased it. As it stands at this moment, that cairn would be taken to be just the common type of Tibetan *obo* with its legend obliterated by weather."

"You seem to meet every objection, Philipson," I said. "But frankly, as man to man, do you really expect to find this supposed valley with its white race?"

"Why not? If that poor devil of a priest could find it, travelling alone and on foot, without equipment and without food, it will say little for my capabilities as an explorer if I cannot do as much with all the outfit for a cross-mountain expedition. Whatever happens, I shall never rest now till I have settled the question one way or the other, or left my bones up on those heights in the attempt. Why, Mirlees, an adventure like this is worth risking a dozen lives for. It will be the most wonderful exploration in history."

Saunders Philipson's manner was always openness itself, yet had he deliberately sought around for the most cunning way to win me over he couldn't have brought forward a stronger argument than this. The lure of the thing was irresistible. Already I saw myself bringing back the secret of this hidden land to the outer world, and heard my name ringing round the planet, and saw the faces of some of my former critics among the orientalists. These folks had set me down as a reckless liar in the past. Now they would have something really to get themselves excited about.

"I'm in it with you, Philipson," I said at last, "in it to the death. But there's the rub—the possible death. Nasty accidents have been known to happen up on that roof of the world. I haven't money enough to pay the lawyer's fee for writing a will, but there are some manuscripts among my baggage that I don't want lost, still less stolen and printed under another man's name. I'd give a good deal to return to Shanghai before we start."

Philipson shook his head gravely. "Most perilous," he said. "The gang we escaped last night will know at any moment now that the down coast scent was false—if indeed they have not learned as much already. They will concentrate on Shanghai till a fresh trail is picked up. For either of us to show his face in the city at present would be suicidal."

"By the way, Philipson, who *are* the gang?"

"H'm. Of course. I did not tell you. They are members, Mirlees, of a large and powerful secret society, whose headquarters are at the monastery of Shigatse, in Tibet. During my novitiate I gathered that there was something of the sort in existence, though no mention of it was ever made to me. I fancy it started there centuries ago, as a purely religious organization, but that it has since extended over China and taken on a character the very reverse of religious, though it still preserves the ancient hidden form of language which was used by Sbrang Chikya on the *obo*. I have been able to discover one or two things about the society since my return to Shanghai, but I little dreamed its agents were actually in the city and had marked me down for destruction."

"You're sure of that?"

"I recognized one of my former fellow monks during our encounter in the opium hell."

"What were you after there?"

"Facts. Since I got the translation of the legend I have been constantly on the lookout for confirmation of it, however slight. It seemed impossible that a race like this people of the legend should lie hidden in their valley through the centuries without at least some vague tradition of their existence developing in neighbouring lands. I had heard of no such tradition, but other men might. I made veiled but thorough inquiries among natives who have used the caravan routes of the interior a good deal, and at last came upon a man who professed to know something about it.

"We were to meet in that den, then go on to his house. I now see the whole scheme. The monks at Shigatse had divined from certain questions I put to them that I was on the track of some land of gems in the interior, which had originally been discovered by one of their own fraternity. They wanted to filch my information and revenge themselves upon me for entering their monastery and penetrat-

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ing some of *their* secrets under false pretences. The fellow who was to give me information was put up as a trap, to get hold of this inscription and certain papers."

PHILIPSON threw himself back in his chair, staring at the wall above my head. He then began feverishly turning over the papers he had drawn from his wallet.

"What's wrong?" I cried.

Philipson glared at me in a sort of suppressed fury. "This is wrong, Mirlees," he muttered between his teeth. "The man you are partnering yourself with is about the clumsiest fool in Asia. When I came away from my house I thought I had all my papers with me. But I had not. One packet is missing—the one containing half the maps of my journey down country."

"That's essential, of course?"

"Vital. It's the end of the trail I've left behind. The other I might dispense with—with extreme good luck I might find the *obo* from memory if I had a correct start. As it is, I would not guarantee to get within a hundred miles of it."

"H'm. Perhaps you'd better let me risk Shanghai after all, Philipson," I said. "I could get the maps as well as settle my own affairs."

He remained staring at the wall. "Plucky of you to volunteer, Mirlees," he said at last. "But if either of us is to go, I might every bit as well go myself. Both of us would stand an excellent chance of being murdered."

At this moment there was a violent commotion outside our room. Philipson shot the papers back into his pocket and sprang up, covering the door with a revolver, as I could see, through the silk of his jacket. We heard scuffling footsteps and the voice of the Chinese landlady raised in strident wrath. Philipson tiptoed to the door, opened it quietly, and peered out, while I followed him, peeping over his shoulder. With the woman was a boy of about twenty-one, in European clothes and, apparently, a genial phase of alcohol, bowing and scraping to her like a dancing master and talking a sort of high-falutin' jargon of which she couldn't possibly have understood two words.

When he had satisfied himself there was nobody else, Philipson stepped out on to the broad landing, with me at his heels. The newcomer turned and faced us. He was short, well-knit, clad in smartly cut pongees that had suffered a little, it seemed, from his adventures of the evening; and as he bowed to us—with just a suspicion of a lurch—his regular, freckled features broke into a smile that disclosed two rows of very small white teeth. Whatever the fellow was, he was no hobo.

"Good evening, gentlemen," he said. "Would you believe it, this flinty-hearted woman actually denies me access to my rooms!"

The proprietress likewise turned to us, with shrill protest. "Dis man he no hab pay money!" she screamed. "No more long time can stay in dis house."

The youth threw up his hands disdainfully, as if surprised. "How paltry," he exclaimed. "To break the harmony of our relations over a few wretched dollars which I do not for the moment happen to possess!"

Philipson had been taking stock of the youth very comprehensively, though he didn't appear to be aware of it.

"What's your name, young man?" demanded my friend.

The newcomer returned Philipson's keen look with equal directness, raising his eyebrows slightly. "Abruptly asked, if I may say so," he remarked. "My name is Stephen Poyning, at your service"—and with this he fetched a rather grandiose sweep of the topee he was holding in his hand.

"How much do you owe her?"

Poyning faced the landlady. "Prithee, woman," he said, "state the extent of indebtedness."

"Dis man he no hab pay fifty dollar!" she returned.

Philipson pulled a wad of notes from his pocket, counted out five of ten dollars each, pushed them into the landlady's hand and took her by the shoulders and directed her downstairs with a good deal more determination than gallantry.

"Now, sir," he said, turning to Poyning, "having relieved your immediate needs, I venture to inquire what is your business here."

Poyning fanned himself elegantly with his hat. "There lies the whole pathos of the situation," he said. "I have none. My occupation up to this time has been merely the search for business, the quest of some small nook in the great world machine of labor. I may say that the quest has been diligently prosecuted, but utterly barren of result."

"H'm. You cannot get a job."

"The merchant princes of this land, sir, have been but very faintly impressed with the desirability of enlisting my services. In Shanghai—would you credit it?—I could scarce get them to believe I was not in jest; and here, too, beyond the offer of a post to pack frozen game in a warehouse—side by side, I believe, with native operatives—nothing whatever has presented itself. And I, gentlemen, took a first at the University of Oxford."

"Come into this room," said Philipson, leading the way.

Poyning followed. On seeing the quartette

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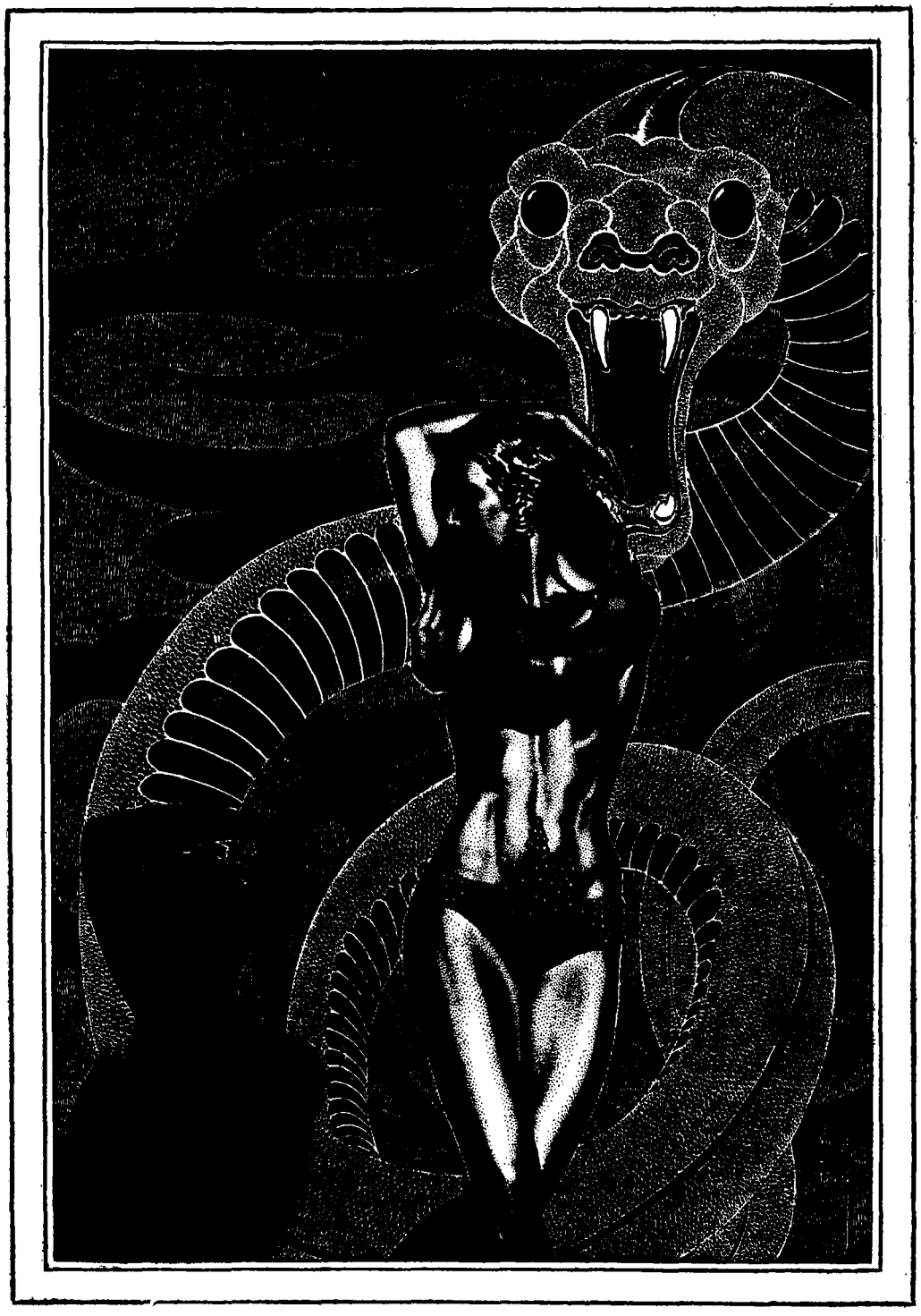

Her lithe limbs swayed to and fro with the evil grace of a snake.

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of bottles on the table his eyes lit up. "One who understands the art of living, I observe," he said. "And now, worthy Macedonian, what can I do to vent my gratitude for your most timely loan?"

Philipson was staring at the youth very hard. "Gift," he corrected, shortly. "Usury is not among my failings."

Poyning bowed again. "And a bourgeois pride is not among mine," he said. "Gift be it called, then, which is the more noble, and moves me to livelier thanks. How can I translate them into action?"

"Wait here for a few moments," said Philipson, moving suddenly to the door. "Stay in this room, the pair of you, till I come back."

As soon as he was gone I motioned our visitor to a chair. "You're a pretty cool hand," I said. "D'you always call people fancy names? For some reason best known to yourself you called my friend 'worthy Macedonian.'"

He screwed a glass into his eye and rounded on me with an expression of astonishment—whether feigned or genuine I couldn't tell.

"Dear me," he said, "can it be that the allusion was lost upon you? And yet you would appear from your externals to be a man of some culture."

"Maybe," I said, nettled at his bland impudence, "but what has that to do with it?"

"Possibly your studies have at some time or other taken you into that temple of learning known as the British Museum?"

"They have, but I still don't see what the devil you're driving at."

"Curious," observed Poyning. "The Grecian type of your friend's beauty—our friend's, if I may say so—is so marked that it struck me at once. An idle fancy of mine, of course, but the reason I addressed him as worthy Macedonian was that his features bear a perfect resemblance to the busts of Alexander the Great."

IT WAS such a far-fetched observation to make that I thought the boy must be more elevated than he looked, but if he was, he could at least keep himself in hand. Finding me silent, he made no advance from his side, but took a cigarette from his own case and lit it; and there we sat smoking in silence until Philipson returned.

The moment he entered the room I could see by his face that he had taken one of those sudden resolves I was already beginning to get accustomed to.

"So you have been looking for work, Poyning," he began, "and you have found none?"

Poyning solemnly inclined his head. "The dismal situation is as I have already painted it," he said. "You gentlemen, no doubt skilled observers of the East and its peculiarities, can perhaps suggest the reason of my failure? Tell me, is there anything in my appearance that might be expected to militate against success?"

Philipson seemed to find this funny, for I noticed he was biting his lip when he answered. "If you will allow me to say so, Poyning," he said, "you are about the last type in the world the merchant princes of this country are looking for. Still, there are other employers besides the merchant princes. Perhaps I can offer you something to go on with. Would you care to earn a thousand dollars?"

"By any task a man of delicacy may fittingly undertake."

"It is certainly a matter of delicacy—so much so that I must stipulate for absolute secrecy before I let you hear a word about it. Will you swear?"

"By all the powers of beauty and light!" said Stephen Poyning.

"It is also a matter of extreme danger."

"Not more perilous, I fancy," returned Poyning suavely, "than the grisly spectre of starvation which hangs over me at this moment."

It was, as I say, a high-falutin' manner of talk that this little exquisite used, but there was something in his demeanour that soon made me begin to have hopes of him; and I believe Philipson had come to similar conclusions a good deal quicker than I had.

"Very well," he said. "The business is this. We two have vitally important affairs to transact in Shanghai, but it is not feasible for either of us to return in person. Our matters must be seen to through an agent, and even he, I may tell you at the outset, stands quite a good chance of coming to grief at the hands of the same men who will be on the watch for us."

Poyning clasped and unclasped his small womanly hands. "It sounds by far the most interesting thing I have yet heard in China," he mused.

"Now listen closely," said Philipson, "for I am going to give you your instructions. The people of this inn think we are on a pleasure trip from Hankow, and you must do nothing to undeceive them. You will slip out secretly to the railway station and catch the down train, which leaves this place at midnight. That will get you into Shanghai by seven in the morning. It is probable that the station will be watched, so be on your guard. You will let your ricksha boy pull you away in the direction of the European quarter—which he will do of his own accord since you are a foreigner—but not until you come to the river will you tell him to go to the Marco Polo Hotel, and not too loudly then. That is

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where my friend was staying before we left.

"You will clean up and have breakfast, then see the manager in your own room and explain to him that my friend has been called away to Canton on urgent business and that you have come to settle his account, pack his belongings, and put them into store. My friend will give you a note and detailed instructions as to what he wants done. This will take you till ten o'clock. You will then go out and buy a good second-hand suitcase without any initials on it—or at least you must studiously avoid one with your own."

Poyning had sat quite still, with an air of some concentration. He now looked up inquiringly.

"Because your initials happen to be the same as my own," added Philipson rather brusquely. "Saunders Philipson is my name, and my friend is Ronald Mirlees—so steer clear of R.M., too. You will then go to Obermeyer's, on the Bund, and buy a good chronometer and a sextant. You will then go to the Bank of Cathay, where you will cash a big cheque for me—or rather exchange it for a letter of credit on the bank's Chungking branch: I will give you a note to the manager. You will then return to the Marco Polo Hotel and confine yourself to your room till after dark. Then take a ricsha down to Bubbling Well and proceed to the New Highgate Road on foot. The last bungalow on the right hand side is mine. You will approach with extreme caution, taking particular care that you are not shadowed. Go not to the front door, but to the side, and give five sharp taps—like this."

Philipson knocked with his knuckles on the table, repeating the signal twice.

"My boy, Lo Eng, will let you in. He speaks good English, so you will have no difficulty with him. You will tell him I have gone away for an indefinite period, and that he is to shut the house and return to his people; if he does not hear from me in six months, he is to hand over my belongings to the manager of the Bank of Cathay, who is my executor. Lo Eng is to give you a packet of papers marked 'B,' and in proof of good faith you will show him this seal. You will then get away from the bungalow unobserved, return to the hotel and settle up there, and catch the eleven o'clock train back. It is of the utmost life-and-death urgency that nobody should trace you from my house to the station or from the station here. Is that clear?"

"Lucid as Helicon itself," said Poyning, removing his eyeglass and wiping it with a handkerchief of perfumed silk.

"Then let me hear what you are going to do."

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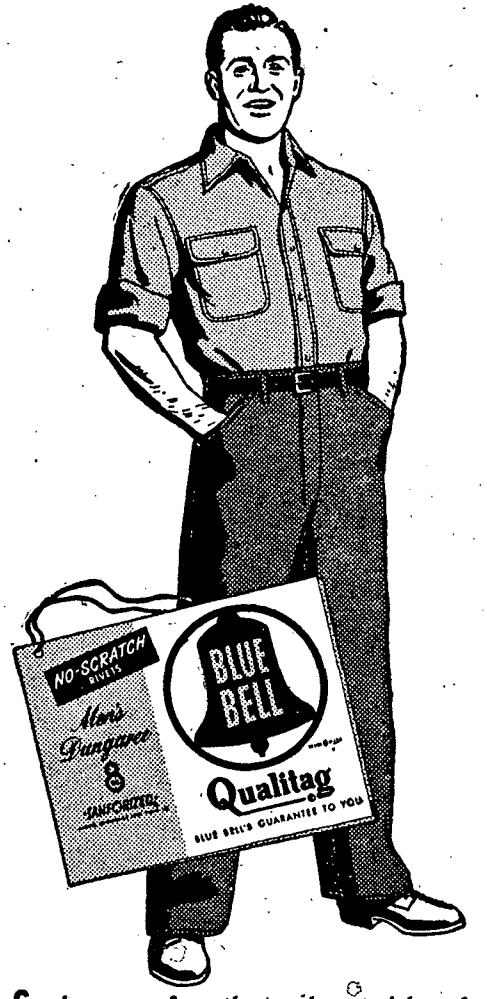

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IT SURPRISED me a little to hear Philipson make this demand. He had rattled off his string of orders so fast that I expected he would at least give the youth something in writing, however cryptic, to remember them by. But my real surprise came when Poyning recited the whole, not only accurately, but, as far as I could myself remember, in Philipson's own words.

The latter sprang to his feet. "Excellent," he said. "You already begin to justify my belief in your capability. Those are your marching orders, then. Carry them out as exactly as you have rehearsed them, and payment awaits you on your return."

"If I might suggest two amendments—" began Poyning.

"What do you mean?"

"This. My own rooms in Shanghai are still, I regret to say, unsettled for. I propose to utilize part of the day in closing them. For this purpose I should be glad of certain of those thousand dollars in advance. The opportunity of withdrawing from that hub of commerce in strict honor and solvency may not present itself to me again, gentlemen. It must be grasped now."

"Then you are not going back to Shanghai eventually?"

"I do not regard that as at all probable."

"What are you going to do here?"

"I was not, to tell the truth, proposing to remain in this picturesque but somewhat unpromising field of labor, either."

"Indeed. Well, it is no affair of mine, Poyning, but if I could put you in the way of a berth, I would—particularly if you carry out this commission of mine satisfactorily. Have you any idea *what* you are going to do?"

Poyning's small freckled features wrinkled into a grin. "I think it is more than possible," he said, "that I shall accompany you to Chungking and those more distant regions which you will be visiting in the near future."

Philipson set down his glass with a clatter. "What *the devil do you know about our* intentions?" he said sharply.

"I pretend to no exact knowledge," replied Poyning, waving his small hand, "but I should be dull indeed if I had gathered no inkling from what you have told me. You see, Philipson, I'm no fool, though my classical qualifications may not seem an asset in the pork-packing circles where I have vainly hawked them. You are going to Chungking—your letter of credit betrays as much. But the amount of the cheque which you will give me to change and the length of time you will be away seem to me to indicate that your true objective lies beyond that port: that you have, in fact, some rather considerable expedition in view."

"Suppose we have. What use do you think you should be to us?"

"There, again, a little elementary thought solves the conundrum for me. The fact that you are obliged to take such detailed precautions in order to get away from this area with a whole skin argues that you would be none the worse for the company and support of a person who, though he should not be the one to proclaim it, is a good shot with small arms and no worse afflicted with cowardice than most."

"I see," said Philipson, drily, glancing at the watch on his wrist. "If *we* are to benefit by the arrangement, eh?"

"To the extent I have indicated," retorted *Poyning, quite unabashed.* "My profit from the enterprise, on the other hand, will be co-equal with yours. The great wildernesses of earth, gentlemen, have always called to me, and those lands which you are going to visit beyond Chungking will answer very nicely, I've no doubt, to the description of a wilderness. I would go forth into it with you. If you gratify my ambition, there is *my* half of our mutual gain."

Philipson looked at his watch again. "No time to go into the matter now, anyway," he said. "You must catch tonight's train without fail. I will get ready the things you are to take, and Mirlees will tell you in the meantime what he wants done in Shanghai."

While Philipson was busy at a side table with pen and ink, I gave Poyning my instructions for the safeguarding of my slender properties. He listened quietly, repeated word for word what I had said, and tapped his forehead as a man might the lid of a cash-box after locking away valuable securities in it.

"Now, Poyning," said our leader, returning to the middle of the room, "here is money for your expenses and purchases, the note to my bank, the cheque, and my seal. I am also advancing you two hundred dollars out of your honorarium. That enough? Right. As to whether you join forces with us for good, I say nothing yet. I like the look of you and I like the sound of you, but I do not take you right into my concerns until I have some solid proof of your steel. Get away to Shanghai and bring off these commissions successfully, and I shall be open to admit that you are a man worth my while taking on a mission which, to say no more of it, will want men of no ordinary temper. Good luck and God be with you!"

POYNING took his leave of us much in the grand manner, but as I looked at his face it seemed to me that underneath that mask of the exquisite there was something of shrewdness and sand that would go a long

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way and not be lightly turned back. He slid quietly downstairs and we heard no more of him. Soon after he had gone I went along to my bedroom—for I was dog-tired—leaving Philipson deep in thought and the contemplation of two fresh bottles of wine which he had had brought up.

And now I come to the first of those mysterious episodes that happened on our journey up country and bear, as I now see, so profoundly on the queer adventures we were to meet with afterwards. I have made my account of this with great care and constant reference to the very clear recollection of the event my memory retains; and I don't think that in what follows there is one jot more or less than I actually observed.

I don't know whether it was because of the heat, which was steamy and penetrating, or because of the mosquitoes that had already come up in clouds from the swampy land bordering the creek; but weary as I was, I couldn't sleep a wink. I lay tossing and turning and going over in my mind our jumpy experiences of the past forty-eight hours, and the longer I lay, the more feverishly alert I grew. Every noise of the night, the mumble of talk from the servants' quarters at the far end of the inn, an occasional clanging ricsha-bell away in the city, the screech of an early cicada on the lawns, even the subtle hiss of water among the roots of the willows beneath our wall—all came to my ears magnified about fourfold. When Philipson withdrew to his bedroom some hours after I had left him, the noise he made was relatively deafening. I heard him throw himself on to the bed with a jangle of springs, and then lay dozing, praying for sleep but more honestly inclined to swear at my insomnia.

At last, opening my eyes, I saw there was a curious light outside the window, so bright that at first I thought some native house on the other side of the creek must be going up in flames. I got out of bed and looked on to the verandah that ran along outside our wing of the inn. Then I saw where the illumination came from: it was the moon, full and brilliant, which had climbed round to that side of the building and was bathing the creek in a glory of silver and gold. Without the distraction of stewy heat and savage mosquitoes it would have been a picture to paint or write poetry about.

Then, suddenly, I became conscious of voices farther along the verandah. I couldn't distinguish the words, but I knew at once the language was not English. Nor was it any dialect of Chinese I ever struck, and I have heard and spoken most. All caution drowned in a prickling curiosity, I stepped noiselessly out on to the verandah and peeped round the jutting stone jamb of the window. Now I saw the speakers, and at the sight I could have cried out in my astonishment. There were two figures, a man and a woman. The former looked to me uncommonly like Saunders Philipson, dressed as I had left him a few hours before. The real stunning surprise for me, however, was in the appearance of the woman. She was no dusky, cramp-footed native, but manifestly European, tall, queenly, with bare head and loose gown, and so far as I could distinguish her features, of a remarkable beauty.

I drew back into cover of my window and stood there with thumping heart, a pitiful mess of indecision. Philipson was, as I had already learned, a strange fellow. He had betrayed pronounced eccentricity in the direction of strong drink; now I saw him in his even stranger relations with women. Who the beautiful stranger was or whence she came, I couldn't conceive, but it seemed plain enough she must have been there by assignation. She could only have got on to that verandah through his sleeping chamber, for I had heard Philipson lock the door of the sitting room before he retired, and I had certainly been too wide awake for anybody to pass through my room without my knowledge, even had the door not been secure on the inside, which it was. There was no other way.

What should I do? If this was merely some clandestine romance of Philipson's, I had a shrewd notion he would take any interference from me vastly amiss, perhaps even to the length of breaking with me. And yet I had to admit that the time, and our circumstances, seemed strangely out of tune with secret love affairs. A sudden fear took hold of me. I had already seen Philipson once the victim of treachery. Could it be that our enemies had discovered our whereabouts and set another snare, this time in more crafty and seductive shape?

What I should have done I don't know, but at that moment there was a gentle knock at the bedroom door. This clinched my suspicions. I snatched up a revolver and faced round, demanding who was there. No answer came, but the knock was repeated. Then I realized that it was the peculiar five taps—Philipson's own code—that had been given. I tiptoed to the door, unbolted and pulled it ajar, covering the aperture with my gun. An instant later I had lowered the muzzle, for there stood Ah Sing, shivering and hoarse with excitement.

"Hab look-see master him window," he whispered, stabbing with his finger in the direction of Philipson's room. "Him talkee-

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talkee some *tai-tai* my no sabbee. My no likum dat. My tinkee him talkee-talkee some damn bad man him come hit master one big whop!"

Ah Sing, then, from his post on board the launch, had also observed this mysterious visitor, and to his faithful mind had occurred at once the same suspicion of a decoy. That decided me. I would risk any row with Philipson rather than let him be held in talk on the verandah while all kinds of villainy might be hatching behind him. I peered along the shadowy landing, but could see nobody. Perhaps already an enemy had gained entrance to Philipson's bedroom, where no doubt his precious papers were left unguarded.

Followed by Ah Sing, I ran along to the door and listened. There was no sound whatever. I tried the door: it was locked. I rapped, using Philipson's knock, first softly, then louder, and at last called him by name. There was no reply. Now thoroughly scared, I sent Ah Sing round through my bedroom to warn his master from that side. He was back at my side a few seconds later, his eyes staring, his mouth agape.

"Hab look-see master no hab see!" he panted.

It was at this instant that something inside the bedroom moved. I heard a soft, uneven step, the key was turned in the lock, the door came slightly open, and the muzzle of a revolver appeared round the style. I sang out sharply:

"Philipson!"

One instant after that the door was swung wide, and we stood face to face. I say we stood, though it would be nearer the truth to say that I, at least, staggered.

Philipson was in pajamas. His hair was tousled down over his face and his eyes, which he rather dazedly rubbed with his free fist, were blinking and heavy-lidded, as of a man just roused from deep sleep.

CHAPTER III

THE MISSION OF STEPHEN POYNING

FOR the better part of a minute my tongue simply refused duty. I could no more than stand and gape, while the blood buzzed in my ears and the dim-lit doorway of Philipson's room seemed to rock sideways. Like words spoken in a dream I heard Philipson demand what was up, and Ah Sing's quaint pidgin-English as he panted out his version of the story.

Philipson started back as if he had been struck. His face was in shadow, but I had an impression that his features were working, the way of a man not quite in command of himself. That lasted for only a few seconds, however. When he spoke again it was in the brisk, matter-of-fact tones he would have used to order a fresh can of lubricant for the launch.

"Odd," he muttered. "Odd, and nasty in the extreme! God knows who those people could have been. I had reckoned with a native organization, Mirlees, but nothing more. If there are Europeans in it too—"

"Then it—"

I broke off suddenly. Neither then nor thereafter could I imagine what it was, but something from outside myself seemed to close my lips by force, and there came down over my brain a most uncanny sense of hesitation and bewilderment.

We had all three rushed out on to the verandah, and stood listening, peering out and around in every direction. There was no sound, no sign of movement anywhere; the creek lay like a riband of orange-tinted silver in the staring moonlight, from Nanking came scarcely a murmur of noise. It was the short hour when even a vast Chinese city is quiet between the clamor of two days.

Ah Sing kept watch for the rest of that night, but there was hardly need—I remained vividly awake myself every minute of the time. In the morning I rose so utterly limp that Philipson diagnosed fever from the mosquitoes—which had bitten us both pretty voraciously—and dosed me with a quinine mixture into which I suspect he had dropped some pleasant opiate. At any rate, it wiped the restlessness out of me as if with a sponge, and I slept soundly till lunch.

But if I was below par, Philipson himself seemed at the very pitch of his form, alert, vigorous, in the best of spirits.

We dared not go out of the inn, of course, or even away from our wing of it. Meals were brought up to the sitting room, while Ah Sing fed himself in the cabin of the launch. The engineer-cook had come for orders that morning, and I could see that he, like myself, preserved an uneasy recollection of last night.

I turned in after dinner for a little sleep against the watches we were to stand through the night. This program of Philipson's we carried out, but with no recurrence of the alarm. Ah Sing remained on guard on the deck of the launch till one, then came up to wake Philipson, who stood a trick till four, rousing me at that hour to see us safely through the twilit marches of dawn. At about half-past six o'clock I was putting on a last pipe before breakfast when I heard a step along the landing, and Philipson entered my room.

"If he has succeeded," he burst out abruptly, "he will be here at any minute, and we shall

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start tonight with the fall of dusk. If not—"

He stepped out through my window and walked to the end of the verandah, where it was blocked in by a cheek of brick wall. He peeped stealthily round the angle, then started back.

"Coming!" he muttered.

I took Philipson's place and a peep for myself. From this point a stretch of the winding creekside road into the city was visible, and along it, at a distance, I saw a ricsha approach at the walk. In it sat a huddled figure recognized as Stephen Poyning. The road was already crowded with native traffic, but as I continued to look I noticed another ricsha, about a hundred yards farther off, which seemed to be keeping the first in sight and regulating its pace so as to remain at an even lapse behind.

"He's being followed," I said.

Philipson pulled me away and stared eagerly round the angle of the building. For a few moments he watched, intently silent, and when he drew back it was with an expression of mingled seriousness and relief.

"You recognize the man behind?" he queried.

I took a closer look. "Eh? Isn't it—"

"Lo Eng. My number-one boy. Something has gone awry. Also, Poyning is hurt—there is a bandage under that topee of his."

We stepped back into the sitting room, where Philipson swiftly laid out a small surgical outfit and summoned a servant, bidding him fetch hot water. The boy who brought it had hardly disappeared when there were heavy, ill-guided steps on the stairs without, and Poyning, pale as a corpse, his pongees plastered with mud and dust, staggered in. He set down a suitcase he was carrying, wincingly removed his helmet, and sank into a chair.

Philipson laid a gentle hand on his shoulder. "Not a word, young man," he said, "till I have plugged that hole in your head."

Poyning's white features broke into a drawn grin. "Bacchus before Aesculapius, my dear sir," he said. "Give me a drink!"

I mixed him a stiff champagne and brandy, which he swallowed at a go, and then Philipson, with the speed and firm skill of a surgeon and more than a woman's tenderness, bathed and dressed an ugly gash over the boy's forehead. He lay back for some moments with his eyes closed, while a spot of color came slowly into his cheeks; then sat up and demanded a cigarette, which having received and lighted, Stephen Poyning plunged without further ado into his tale. Lo Eng had meanwhile entered the room. Philipson pointed to a chair, on the edge of which he sat, demurely listening.

"I REACHED Shanghai North Station at about half-past seven yesterday morning," began Poyning. "If there was one native watching the gates, there were a dozen, but these people all seemed to be there on legitimate business—I certainly saw no sign of any of them following me. I got to the Marco Polo Hotel in the unobtrusive manner prescribed by you, cleaned off the travel stains, took nourishment, invited the manager to my room, and settled Mirlees' debt. The manager seemed, if I may say so, relieved to see his money. The instructions regarding your manuscripts, Mirlees, have been carried out to the letter, and your other treasures are stored in the warehouse next door; here are the keys, and the receipts for your chatels and your accommodation charges.

"Here, Philipson, are receipted bills for the chronometer and sextant, which you will find in that suitcase—intact, I trust, though it must be confessed they received some brusque jolts during the later developments of my adventure. Here is the letter of credit on Chungking, which the manager of the Cathay Bank made out in his private sanctum and handed to me with very excellent good luck to you, Philipson, and a hope that the inquiries from your well-wishers in Shanghai would not prove too searching. I did not, to be candid, know what in Hades he was driving at, but I winked in the sophisticated manner of one who did, and the genial financier seemed very well satisfied."

Philipson whistled softly.

"I pass," resumed Poyning, "to the really momentous phase of the expedition.

"I left the hotel at half-past eight, when twilight was falling—as the late Tennyson sang—and reached the fair pleasaunces of Bubbling Well about half an hour afterwards. Here I dismissed my ricsha-coolie, much to his chagrin—it was ten minutes, in fact, before I could shake the ardent fellow off—and loitered along waiting for a suitable person to ask my way. This took some time, as all the white community seemed to be at mess, and I deemed it impolitic to seek guidance from a native. At last I got the required direction, and struck out on foot. I had not marched far down the New Highgate Road before I saw that I was followed. It was a Chinese, a pretty well-nourished subject of medium stature, who dogged my steps, keeping about twenty yards behind. He made no attempt to conceal himself, and when I drew up short, came straight on.

" 'You wanchee find some housum dis road?' he said, debonairly enough. 'My gib you look-a-look anybody housum. My sabbee anybody housum allee same-same.'

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"'Very obliging of you,' I said, 'but who might you be?'

"'My b'long Misser Philipson numbah-one boy,' he said. 'Him housum burn down so my no hab housum lib jus' now.'"

Philipson whistled again, louder.

"'You sabee Misser Philipson?' continued my would-be cicerone. 'You sabbee where him gone jus' now?'

"'Never heard of him,' I said. 'What's your name?'

"'My b'long all same Lo Eng,' replied the fellow, with an expansion of his already wide mouth. 'My wanchee sabbee where master hab gone. Jus' now no can tell him housum burn down.'

"Well, gentlemen, God knows I am no purist, but I could not bring myself to regard that man's conversational style as good English—which you told me Lo Eng spoke. He had given the name correctly, true, but I remained profoundly unsatisfied with his bona fides. I got rid of him, strode on down the road, and soon came to a house which had been gutted. Yes, alas, Philipson, it was only too true. Standing guard in the road were two Sikh policemen, whose presence had the desirable effect of finally scaring away my plausible informant—or so I thought. He had followed me thus far, but when I looked around a moment later he had melted into the atmosphere.

"I walked on briskly, came to a bend in the road, and sprinted down it on noiseless toes. It had occurred to me that I might get to the house from across the fields behind it without apprising the Law; and this I was able to do, though I could have wished for a drier route. I wallowed lost in mud and luxuriant vegetation for about ten minutes, then, thinking all clear, crept towards the charred ruin. I had actually got in the garden when I heard a scuffle somewhere behind me. I fancy the police must have heard it too, for there were footsteps on the gravel walk in front of the house. Then came, from behind, a curious gurgling noise, then a dull thud, then silence. A hand grasped my arm.

"Come sir," whispered a voice, and I felt myself dragged into a clump of laurels. I was subtly aware that my present companion was a friend, and I followed him without question. We crouched together for a while, until the police, presumably supposing they had been deceived, scrunched back into the road.

He then put his lips to my ear.

"'I am Mr. Philipson's boy, sir,' said he, in excellent English. 'You have some message for me?'

"'What is your name?' I asked him.

"'Lo Eng. You have a sign from my master?'

"I gave him the seal to feel, and I heard him murmur his satisfaction. 'Listen,' he said. 'Those devils set fire to the house a few hours after the master went. I took the papers out of the safe, but everything else was destroyed.'

"'You are to give me the bundle marked with a letter B,' I said.

"He took out a thick wad, and handed me an envelope from among them. 'Those are the ones,' said he. 'There is nothing else in the house, for I have searched it. Please tell the *Lao Yeh* I did everything possible to protect his property, but they had lined the walls with kerosene, and all went up very swiftly. Since then I have watched here for my master. Those villains have also watched. One of them followed you down this road tonight. I recognized him from the night of the house-burning. I heard him tell you he was Mr. Philipson's boy. When you ran, you thought you had left him behind, but you had not. He followed you across the fields, so close that he could have killed you. But I was just behind him.'

"'Where is the fellow now?' I whispered.

"My ally drew me deeper into the shrubbery, where I kicked against something soft. 'He will not follow you any more,' he said. 'Help me to cover him up, lest the police find him.'"

At this point Lo Eng sat a little farther forward on the edge of his chair, and broke in, with extreme deference.

"That man struggled very hard, master," he said sweetly. "I discovered afterwards that I had strangled him."

Philipson gravely nodded, and Poyning resumed his story.

"LO ENG showed me a way across to the main traffic routes without touching the New Highgate Road at all, and left me. I caught an inward bound cabriolet to the city, cleared my own debit at the Eastern Seas Hotel, collected my bag from the Marco Polo and settled up there, and eventually reached the station with fifteen minutes to spare. I had been zealously on the watch for followers all the way, and could have pledged my faith that I had none; and yet, as I paced the platform, to my supreme disgust I saw that two natives in the throng at least were taking an abnormal amount of interest in my movements.

"They had been over against a fruit stall in full view of the wicket I should have to pass, but when they saw me, they edged unmistakably in my direction. I walked up and

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down twice: they moved *pari passu.* I realized that if I boarded the Nanking train, even if they did not follow me I should have given away the route you had followed—always supposing these men had connected me with you, which seemed tolerably plain. Then a device occurred to me.

"There was a local train standing in the station. It was due to leave for Wusung at ten-fifty. I regarded this as proof that the gods were on my side. I went to the booking office and bought a ticket for Wusung, intending to board the train, walk straight through it, and gain my own by way of the track, trusting to providence and a villainously illuminated station; but my two rascals were too quick for me. I saw them get into a compartment about four distant from mine. The situation, gentlemen, was growing strained, and I had already decided not to travel at all that night, but to slink back into the city and try again later, when yet another subterfuge came to my mind. I knew that I could not leave that train without detection—at any rate so long as it stood in the station. But if I waited until it started, and then jumped, I might yet outwit the enemy. This course I followed, though without the smooth success I had hoped. I waited too long before jumping, and came the very disastrous cropper which resulted in this bloody cockscomb you have been good enough to patch for me; and even at that sacrifice did not elude my two ruffians.

"As I fell I had a blurred consciousness of other bodies falling from the train, and I know that they fell with more agility than I did, for they were up and upon me in an instant. I began to lay about me, but not dangerously, for my head was swimming and I had frankly given up hope of getting out of the imbroglio alive, when I realized that there was more in it than at first appeared. There were three murky shapes on that murky railway track—we were over a hundred yards out of the station—but one of them was fighting on my side. I plucked up heart, and gave one of the roughs such a taste of the fighting blood of the Poynings that he fell backwards across the metals, struck his head, and lay still. The other appeared to have had the worst of it with my ally, and the next thing I knew, I had grabbed the suitcase and was bundling back along the track with Lo Eng—to whose battling abilities throughout I would take this occasion to bear the very warmest testimony. You'd better ask him what happened after."

Lo Eng waited for a sign from Philipson, then delivered himself to this effect:

"I feared that Mr. Poyning would be followed back into Shanghai, so I followed him myself, all the way to the station. There it was as I feared. I do not know how those men knew he was the gentleman they were looking for, but they did know. I could see that he knew he was being observed by them too. They were so intent on Mr. Poyning that they did not see me get into the next carriage of the Wusung train. When they jumped out, I jumped also. Then we fought, as Mr. Poyning has said, and left those two men on the rails and ran back to the Nanking train. It was just moving.

IN THE NEXT ISSUE

THE DEATH MAKER

By Austin J. Small

One man alone held the power to wipe out a great city in one night, to obliterate an entire nation in seven short days. And he meant to do just that, secure in the knowledge that there was no possible defense against his dread weapon that would soon make him the mad master of all human destiny!

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"He was so injured that he could not get up from the ground, so I climbed into the train with the suitcase and pulled him up behind me. It was very difficult to do, and by the time we were on board, the train was moving too fast for me to get off again. I had no ticket, but Mr. Poyning paid my fare to the conductor. Then I bound his head, which was bleeding, and he fell asleep until we reached here this morning. We have not been followed since."

Philipson rose from his chair and patted the servant's shaven head. "You have done well, Lo Eng," he said. "You are a boy to be proud of."

The boy looked down at his demurely folded hands. "There is no house in Shanghai for me to guard now," he murmured "The car was destroyed too."

"Eh? That's the way the wind blows, is it? Very well, we shall be glad of such a trusty servant, I have no doubt. You will go down and stay on board the launch with Ah Sing now, and wait for orders."

As soon as Lo Eng was out of the room, Philipson took Poyning's hand and shook it. "I am eternally beholden to you, Poyning," he said warmly. "You have handled this business not only with discretion but with a most commendable quantity of pluck. You had better lie down now till breakfast is ready. After that, we will go into the future."

"Well," said Philipson to me, when we were alone, "what think you? Should we take the youth into partnership?"

"Seems to me," I said, "the question is, will he take us?"

WHEN Poyning came in to breakfast, much renovated, we sat down to one of the jolliest meals I ever remember. Philipson steered clear of the subject of our forthcoming journey yet, but kept up a brisk fire of yarns of his former experiences in the East: and I for one had to admit that if I flattered myself I knew something about the great yellow lands from Ladakh on the roof of the world to Kamchatka of the frozen north, my knowledge was mere schoolboy geography to Saunders Philipson's. Then we pushed away our plates and lit up, and Philipson plunged into the business ahead of us, laying the whole story before Poyning exactly as I had heard it myself. The junior partner listened with the sort of negligent alertness he had shown when taking his orders for the Shanghai commission, but I could see, underneath this, that the story excited him a good deal more than it had me.

"Well, there you are, Poyning," concluded our leader. "You know all the ascertained facts now. It will be a dangerous, death-or-glory business—but at least a profitable one, if my suspicions are well founded."

The boy shrugged his shoulders. "Diamonds would be an agreeable incidental, certainly," he said, "but I should be perfectly ready to risk my life going to that valley if there were no mention of gems in the legend at all."

Poyning said this in such a serious and decided tone that you might almost have fancied he meant more than he said.

"Then you're with us?" queried Philipson.

"I am," said Stephen Poyning firmly.

We shook hands on the bargain and swore, all three of us, to tear the mystery out of that shadowy land behind the mountains or add our names to the long list of explorers who have died of curiosity.

The day was spent in a lively bustle of preparation. When the time came to leave we stole out of our creek propelled by the pair of small oars the launch carried; and I've no doubt that in the fickle light before moonrise we passed easily enough for one of the innumerable native boats thronging the mouth of the inlet and the margins of Yangtze River.

We rowed well out into the stream, turned our nose westward, and proceeded on a throttled engine until we had left Nanking a mile or two over our quarter.

Philipson kept the tiller, Poyning and I sat down in the well, while Ah Sing tended the engine and Lo Eng, in the cabin, got ready the beds against such time as we should turn in. My last recollections before dropping off in my bunk were the lady-like snores of Poyning.

The next day was eventless, and so close to our leader's schedule that we might have been a passenger service. Hour after hour we forged ahead, the engine running smoothly and tirelessly as the wings of the great gulls over our heads, and a little before nightfall we had drawn within view of the hills that reach away south of Kiukiang. Here we tied up in an inlet at one end of the bund, and slept on board, creeping out again before the break of day, and pushing on up stream till dusk.

At last, two ranks of light like the lamps of a long street began to blink out of the grey shadows ahead; and we came into a great expanse of water swarming with craft of every conceivable build, from liner and ocean-going tramp down to the lorchas and wupans and crazy houseboats of the amphibious population of these parts. To the right of us lay Hankow, with its long bund and its hulks running out into the river and its opulent business houses behind; on the southern bank, the battlemented, sombre city of Wuchang.

We drew opposite a small native wharf on the south side, then turned and ran in.

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"The boat will need mending. Put your hand down here," said Philipson quietly.

He had stooped into the well and lifted out a small bit of bottom-boarding. I felt below it, and drew up my hand wet to the wrist. There were four or five inches of water inboard of us.

"It is obviously small," he muttered, "but we must overhaul the boat before we go on. It will never do to try the rapids higher up with a gap in our strakes."

The yard we had come to was capitally suited to our ends, being shut in on all sides except for a narrow water frontage; and even that was still further secluded by two timber partitions running out like the walls of a fives-court. The place, moreover, afforded easy and secret access to a native inn outside the city wall, where Philipson told us we were to spend the night. The proprietor of the yard had clearly had truck with Philipson before, since he greeted him with marked respect and more than a shade of fear.

"The good Charon seems to know you, Philipson," said Poyning, as we stood together on the jetty, while three coolies hauled the launch out of the water with a small capstan of native pattern.

"He does," replied our leader. "I had the good fortune to save him from the headsman some years ago, under circumstances that will not bear repeating. He has shown his gratitude by helping me several times since. Now, to business. You two can be of no use to me here. You had better get along with Lo Eng to our quarters for the night. He will give you a meal, but do not wait for me. I shall possibly be late."

Philipson was. We had finished our meal and smoked many pipes before he arrived, a little after midnight.

"Rather worse than I thought," he said, setting ravenously about a cold chicken and a bottle of hock.

"What's wrong with her?"

"A leak just under the forefoot. We must have started a plank when we struck the other boat in Whangpu River, and gradually opened it out while we drove upstream. There is a good deal of sunken driftwood in the river at most times—I expect you heard her bump against it?"

"Time and again, but never very hard."

"Exactly. It would not hurt a sound boat, but with the strake already loose it is only a matter of keeping on long enough to develop a nasty hole. Luckily we spotted it in time."

"All right now?"

"I fancy so; but it is impossible to say, working with their wretched lamps. I must go over her thoroughly by daylight. Better turn in now, Mirlees, as I shall want you at dawn. It becomes necessary for me to cross to the Hankow side, on business which I shall certainly get through more safely in native garb. Also I should be glad of a reliable companion in case of accidents, and as a European and a Chinese moving about together are likely to attract a degree of notice we can very well do without, I shall be glad if you will don that Chinese costume which suits you so well. Poyning will meanwhile keep to this side and watch out of window for any suspicious boat on the river."

He rose from the table, threw off his clothes, wrapped himself in a long cotton gown, and was at once asleep on the couch in his corner of the room. Poyning and I—we were all three sleeping in the one chamber—had soon followed suit. There was a deal of noise in and about the inn, but I don't think we heard much of it: certainly I did not. It seemed to me I had only just lain down when I was shaken by the shoulder, and saw Philipson standing by my bed, fully dressed in the rig in which I had first seen him. I hastily made up to match from a bundle Lo Eng had brought from the launch, and after swallowing biscuits and a cup of wine we went down into the yard together. Here I got something of a shock. Our launch was gone, and another had taken her place.

Philipson squeezed my arm. "We had to paint the new plank we put in last night," he whispered, "and I thought it would be advisable to do the rest of the hull while we were at it—in another color. Those dummy wash-streaks forward, too, they transform her considerably, do they not? If there is a description of us about, it may be as well not to answer it. Hullo, here is our boat. Not another word of English now till we are alone again!"

WE ENTERED the sampan he had engaged, and were sculled out across the two miles of stream through a wonderful morning, fine and clear, with a fresh easterly breeze. Even as early as this there was a loud hum of activity abroad; the daily round of the great river port had already begun, and the bustle was still further increased by the arrival of a river steamer which had drawn up to her hulk just as we pushed in to the north bank. We saw the gangplanks swing down and a throng of native passengers surge across them. Philipson had been scanning the crowd, but he suddenly dropped his eyes to the bottom of the boat and muttered an order to the boatman. We turned upstream, taking advantage of any and every craft that lay there or passed, to keep ourselves hidden from the shore, and

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at last reached a jetty about a quarter of a mile from the point where we had originally purposed landing. Here my companion ordered the sampan to wait, and we sprang ashore and straight into two native "chairs"—capital conveyances for a furtive mission, since they were completely closed in—and were borne into the dense warrens of the native city of Hankow by a twisting route that soon robbed me of all sense of direction. I felt my chair set down, and stepping out found that we were in a squalid courtyard walled in on three sides by native houses.

Philipson took my arm and led me through a low doorway in one of the walls, thence along a narrow winding alley, from the end of which we ascended a flight of rickety wooden stairs. There was a door at the head of these, upon which Philipson knocked softly, and I noticed that the signal he gave was his own peculiar five taps. A houseboy came, to whom my companion muttered something in the vernacular which I couldn't catch; then the servant took us through a bare anteroom, and withdrew deeper into this queer, secret dive.

Philipson put his mouth to my ear. "Treat this man with the profoundest respect," he whispered. "He possesses ideas that would do credit to any European revolutionary. The Manchu Dynasty have had a price upon his head for years."

The door opened, and a small wizened Chinaman appeared in the aperture. Taking cue from Philipson I bowed low to him, and we exchanged compliments in the official dialect of Peking, which he spoke with a musical perfection. He drew my companion through into the inner room, closing the door behind them; and there I heard the pair in an agitated mutter of conversation for the best part of twenty minutes. Whatever it was Philipson wanted, he had apparently prevailed upon the rat-like little fellow to give him, for when he came out he was carrying under his arm something wrapped in cloth, angular, the size of a large attaché case, and apparently heavy.

We took an elaborate ceremonial leave, got downstairs and regained our chairs, and within half an hour were harking back across the river, again taking advantage of every floating thing that could screen us from the bank. Ah Sing was standing watch at the yard when we arrived, peeping through the holes in a curtain of old tarpaulins he had rigged up. Philipson ordered me to join Poyning in the inn and get breakfast while he overhauled the launch, promising to follow as soon as he had finished.

We were still at the meal when Philipson came in.

"All's well," he cried cheerfully. "She is tight now—tighter, in fact, than she was before!"

Poyning didn't appear to share the exultation of our chief. He was rolling his eye round the bare room of the inn with an expression of boredom. "A simple, homely interior," he said, "but already I find its charm beginning to pall. When do we tempt the deep again, Philipson?"

"Dusk tonight," replied the leader briskly. "I had not intended to leave this place by daylight in any case, less still now that I know our enemies have reached Hankow."

"You've seen them?"

"I have; and they may have seen me, though Mirlees will tell you that I did my best to avoid this by sheering off on another tack. It is possible, Poyning, that you do not yet fully realize the determination of that company. However, if we succeed in getting away from here unobserved, we are now coming to parts of the river where it will be more and more difficult for them to follow, or to get warnings on ahead of us by telegraph. I am convinced that the delay will be worth while in the long run."

We accordingly sat down to wait, not even venturing outside our room, while Ah Sing kept to his spying post in the yard. Never have I known a day drag so; it would be hard to say which of us was most relieved when night fell, and we could throw down the canvas screen from the launch and heave her down into the water.

We slunk darkly away upstream. If there were watchers, we seemed to have eluded them. By nine o'clock the long lights of Hankow were fading in our wake, and by half-past we had come to a reach strangely deserted and silent after the bustle of the great hub of Chinese riverine traffic. We drove ahead at full speed, Philipson steering.

Suddenly he pricked up his ears. "What's that?" he cried.

We all sat listening. I heard nothing, but about a minute later there came, carried far across the still water, a distinct gunshot, and another after about the same interval.

"Odd!" muttered Philipson. "If we were at sea you might say somebody was trying to make distress signals."

Poyning had stood up, and was peering over the edge of the wash-streaks forward. "There's a curious light in the river straight ahead," he cried. "Great Scott, it's a boat on fire!"

We all looked now, and sure enough, there was a big sailing junk drifting down upon us, broadside on and plainly out of control. Dense smoke bellied from her midships, and by the tongues of flame that licked up through

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it we caught momentary flashlight glimpses of her crew crowding into stem and stern in a panic to get away from the heat. They kept up the minute guns till we were within hail, then raised a chorus of piteous yells.

It was a dilemma. Our own safety rested upon secrecy and speed, and we were in no sort of position to stop for crews of shipwrecked natives. At the same time, to leave them unhelped would be to give them the alternative of a horrible death by fire or the very slim chance of swimming ashore across a mile of strong current either way. We could see no sign of a smaller boat—apparently the junk hadn't one.

Philipson stood staring at the lurid picture. "Nothing for it," he said suddenly. "Yellow or white, it is all human life. I will take them off."

Poyning had run forward and was kneeling behind the dummy wash-streaks, boathook in hand. The next instant he had dropped flat to the deck.

"Down, everybody!" he yelled. "That fire's a fake!"

Three or four shots crashed out, and Lo Eng slid into the wall with a short gasping cough. We had all ducked at Poyning's cry, and Philipson put the tiller hard down, but too late. The way on the launch took us right alongside before we could be turned, and two figures leapt up rifle in hand from behind the junk's house and dashed for us, firing as they ran. Poyning sprang to meet the first, grappled, and thudded with him down on to the deck; the other came on, took these two in his stride like a hurdler, and rushed aft for our engine.

For an instant I saw the fellow outlined against the fire on the junk. Then came a deafening report, something scorched my cheek, and I felt a sting like an exaggerated pinprick in my shoulder. I fell forward, but in the very act of falling I instinctively clutched at his knees as he stood on the cabin roof, and heaved with the last ounce of strength left in me. I think the fellow must have gone overboard, but I don't rightly know. Everything round me became a spongy grey mist. The flashes and reports mingled in a sort of wild, hell-begotten dream. I must have fainted then, for when I next remember, there was a marked change in the aspect of the fight. I myself lay sprawling across the cabin roof—apparently just as I had collapsed. When I lifted my head I realized that we were backing away from the junk and that somebody in our bows was crouching behind a thing that spat fire with a stuttering roar. I saw the great mainmast of the junk totter and fall, dashing the remains of the fire into the water with a smoky hiss, and heard, or thought I heard, a shrill scream of agony and terror from many throats. I rested on my elbows, staring stupidly while the flame from our bows played over the junk like a hose; then I must have lost my senses for a second time. . . .

WHEN I came to, I was lying on a locker in the cabin, while Philipson leaned over me and dabbed something cool on my bare shoulder, which was aching and stinging abominably.

"A nasty jag, Mirlees," he said as he dressed the wound. "That bullet was in two minds whether to expand or not. Luckily it has left the bones alone."

"Who else is hurt?" I queried. "I saw Lo Eng go down."

"He has a hole through the apex of his right lung. Nothing desperate, but he will require careful nursing."

"And you? What's that on your wrist?"

"A mere graze. But the same shot punched a piece out of the tiller, which I must fix without loss of time, or we shall be having a snap in a crisis."

Philipson continued at work all the time he was talking, swiftly and skilfully. Where he picked up his knowledge of surgery I don't know, but I fancy it would have been equal to the emergencies of a battlefield. He was just completing a sling for my arm when Poyning's face, the natural freckles supplemented by a liberal sprinkling of powder-flecks, appeared through the cabin door.

"Come and watch the casualties, Poyning," said our leader. "I will relieve you as soon as I have patched the steering-gear."

Poyning took his place beside me, and squatted in silence, mopping his face with a handkerchief. On the opposite locker Lo Eng was asleep, breathing peacefully.

"Philipson tackled him while you were a-swoon," said Poyning at length, nodding to the boy, "and gave him a cooling mixture which put him off at once. The managing director's bedside manner is distinctively attractive to watch, Mirlees, I assure you."

"You're not hurt?"

"I'm tattooed blue with powder-spirits like any Polynesian, but Philipson hopes it will wash out in after years. Beyond that I am suffering from slight muscular strain and grave loss of self-respect. I fought tonight as no gentleman fights. I—er—bit my antagonist. His gun fell overboard in the course of our struggles, and shortly afterward he fell overboard after it."

"Tell me what happened," I said. "It seems I went green right in the middle of it."

"My own recollection is none too clear,"

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replied Poyning. "One of the boarding party got past me, and I heard him fire. That, apparently, is when you were hit. It was just at this point that I rolled my opponent into the water. I heard another splash after that. Then Philipson yelled to me to come and take the tiller. He had reversed the engine, and we were drawing away. Philipson ran forward and began, as it seemed to me, to pull the launch to pieces. Something came up with a clank, and before you could say knife or any other abrupt monosyllable he had entered upon a new campaign with—ye gods!—a maxim gun. It was one of the pleasantest surprises of my life to learn that we had such an armament on board."

I heard Philipson chuckle in the doorway.

"I was unaware of it myself till yesterday," he said, stooping to enter. "I could never understand why this boat was a little down by the head, but when we took out that damaged plank, I saw quickly enough. There is a false bulkhead forward of the cabin, and behind that a machine gun mounted on a vertical slide built into the hull. When you take away the deck planking above it the thing can be raised to fire over the bows. I give you my word, the whole contrivance is highly ingenious. When I discovered that we had such a treasure I at once set about getting it in working order. That is what kept me so late in the yard last night. The bearing parts were somewhat rusty, but they worked again with persuasion and grease. All that then remained was to find ammunition—a problem which at first seemed formidable enough.

"The venerable desperado we visited in Hangkow, Mirlees, was the man from whom I purchased this boat. That was in Canton two years ago. He had in hand at the time as pretty a little armed rising as you could wish to see. Unfortunately the plot was discovered at the last moment, and my friend was obliged to leave in such haste that he could not even get to his own private launch. So he did the next best thing—sold her to me. He was much surprised to see me this morning, but even more so when I told him I had discovered the hidden gun. At first he wished to buy the launch back. I said that I could not spare it. He pressed the point. I hinted with all possible delicacy that if he were so importunate the imperial authorities might get to hear of his whereabouts. At last he made the best of it, sold me two belts of ammunition at an exorbitant price, and I took it across the stream and installed it in our bows. I think you will admit that measure of precaution was well justified by the event."

"And may be again," said Poyning. "Is there any ammunition left?"

"One belt, but I do not anticipate needing it. Those junks sink quickly when damaged."

My wound healed quickly, and on the third day after the fight I was able to move about in fair comfort. We had now come to the stiffest spell of our river journey—the ascent of the beautiful but perilous Yangtze Gorges. Our ascent was a wild, touch-and-go affair throughout, and I hardly knew whether to marvel more at the capabilities of our boat or the consummate nerve and skill of Saunders Philipson in handling her.

One after another we took the dreaded gullies between the mountains—Niukan, Mitan, Wushan, the Wind-Box Gorge and the "Old Horse"; and when finally we reached Chungking, nine days after leaving the plains, I imagine we had accomplished a feat never before known in the history of Yangtze Kiang. Here Philipson had the launch thoroughly overhauled and put into store. Often during the next few weeks as we crawled up the rapid-fretted Kia Ling River, a tributary of Yangtze, in a native boat, we pined for that queenly little craft we had left behind.

By the middle of June we had come to the small obscure town of Kiai, where we engaged ponies and grooms and now, a party ten strong, struck out westward across "unknown" Asia.

CHAPTER IV

THE VALLEY OF THE GREAT BIRDS

WE BEGAN our land journey in high spirits. Whatever perils nature might be holding up her sleeve, our human enemies were left far behind; and it wasn't till

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now that I realized fully the racking strain of suspense we had undergone since we fled for our lives out of Shanghai. Good was it, too, as we advanced in file, to look back over our shoulders at the sturdy bearers and the wiry hill-ponies that carried the outfit for our expedition. But most satisfactory of all was the thought that we were traveling with Saunders Philipson.

Poyning and I had now reached the pitch of confidence when a man believes in his leader's ultimate success as a certainty. The Chinese servants had known Philipson longer than we, and their trust in him seemed by that much the more implicit. Even the native bearers, after a few days of the master who seemed to know their wants so well and speak their language so fluently and pick out their small shirkings with such intimate comprehension, were beginnning to fall under the magic of his radiant personality.

The third night out, we pitched camp and dined in the nearest approach to elegance we were to know for many a long day. Lo Eng excelled himself in the kitchen—we hadn't yet reached the period of canned foods—and Philipson produced three bottles of red wine which he called upon us to help him empty.

"Let us clean it up," he cried. "We cannot count on restocking the bins for many months—which will fall upon me, at least, with grave hardship—but it will be merely teasing ourselves to make these bottles spin out for a day or two. Besides which, corked wine is never nice. Come, let us pledge success to our journey in a good deep pull!"

It sticks in my mind very clearly, that scene round the camp fire. Behind us rose great hills of red rock, now deepened by the falling light to a crimson as dark as the wine of our toast and sweeping away in majestic ranks on either side of the pass through which we should work westward. The natives were squatting round their fire a little way off, cooking their evening meal and, I'm afraid, burning slips of joss-paper to scare off evil spirits of the hills; while the ponies, picketed at some distance beyond the bearers, were pulling contentedly at the scant grass of the highlands. Beside the tarpaulin that served us for a tablecloth, Poyning, with a quaint hint of dandyism in his rough mountaineering rig, sat puffing at one of his carefully hoarded cigarettes through a dapper little ivory and amber holder. At this time he still possessed his eyeglass, though I fancy it subsequently went the way of so much more gear that we scattered along that desperate trail. Philipson, who never smoked except to sustain some native guise, was leaning forward, the light of the fire leaping over his lean-chiselled features; and as he laid down his aluminum wine cup after pledging a swift and successful trek to us all, he began to speak.

"Listen to me, you fellows," he said earnestly. "This is going to be the biggest adventure any man here has ever undertaken. It will also be the most dangerous. The journey to the *obo* alone is severe enough, and what lies beyond that, God knows, though from what I remember of the look of the mountains it will be far more difficult than anything this side. But if you follow me heart and soul, I believe I can lead you over to the valley beyond. Trust me as you would trust the eternal truths of life, and I shall not fail you. I know I can carry it through!"

His voice rang, his eyes gleamed, his hands clutched and unclutched, and altogether Saunders Philipson looked like a man inspired—which, for my part, I fully believe he was.

We made the long stage he foretold, and several longer after that. Hour upon hour, hour upon hour we rode up precipitous gullies and down seemingly impossible ravines, but always drew higher in the long run. The mere exertion of sitting our ponies was tremendous. I soon came to realize that never before in a life that would be reckoned abnormally strenuous, had I really known what fatigue meant, and Poyning was worse off than I; but weariness never seemed to show itself on Philipson.

I soon saw the wisdom of his policy of taking mountain ranges at a run, for here we were, with the summer still before us, and the first great barrier range behind. The country began to descend, the going was easier and faster, and after a few days' march down a long slant we came within view of our first big landmark. I heard the bearers raise a shout and saw them throw out their arms, pointing. There, still far ahead, was a curious bluey shimmer on the rough yellow face of the earth.

Philipson was scanning this through the glasses.

"What do you make of it, Mirlees?" he cried.

"It ought to be the head waters of the Yellow River," I replied.

"Right. Or rather, the upper waters. The actual sources are about seven days farther on. When we reach them I can promise you a breather of three whole days."

All fell out as he foretold. We encamped beside the Hsing Hai, or "Starry Lakes," which, rising out of springs in the plain, form the beginnings of that mighty flood known many hundreds of miles farther east as China's Sorrow.

Here we rested three days.

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POYNING spent most of the three days asleep, while Philipson was busy with Lo Eng overhauling stores and looking for fresh bearers. The men of Kiai had only contracted to come this far, but partly by enhanced rewards and partly by a judicious blend of threat and blandishment Philipson prevailed on them to stay with us until relieved. The new company, of ten men, we raised at length from a wretched hamlet on the foothills southward of the lakes. They were *tagliks* (hillmen) of indeterminate race and small prepossession, and they hadn't been with us long before they gave us ample reason to regret the sturdy Ssuchuanese whose place they had taken.

At dawn on the fourth day we struck out westward again, at the best pace we could make. We should soon be at heights where the "hot" weather nights are arctic and winter allows nothing human to live. It was Philipson's purpose to hold on this course until we cut across the route of his former journey, then to work by means of his maps to the *obo* among the mountains. Before we had travelled many days the country was rising sharply again, its aspect changing from hour to hour. The scattered tamarisks of the plateau were left far behind, now nothing grew to soften the staring nakedness of red sandstone and green slate but here and there a patch of wiry, bleached grass, out of which the ponies could get but a meagre supplement to the limited fodder we carried. Now and again we sighted the beautiful yellow-brown wild ass, sometimes the fleeting form of some type of antelope, while at night we were glad of our camp fire not only for its warmth, but also for the protection it gave us against the wolves we heard howling hungrily around us. Gradually, however, as we drew higher and higher, even these signs of life dropped out of the vast desolation, and we saw nothing but an occasional herd of yak, the wild bull of Tibet.

Deeper and deeper we plunged into the mountain fastnesses. It was clear from the temperature our cooking water boiled at that we had risen to a great altitude, and Poyning and I were already troubled with height-sickness.

Philipson was working toward the *obo* very much as if it were a point in the ocean and he was a mariner steering a course to it; he used his maps as a chart and checked our position by observations whenever the sky cleared. The lie of the land necessitated constant changes of direction, and sometimes we had even to deviate from Philipson's former route, which, it will be remembered, he had followed on foot; but never would our leader consent to leave the course laid down on his maps unless it was physically impossible to get the ponies along it. As it was, our journey took us up and down steeps which rise in my mind to this hour like a ghastly dream—one of those nightmares when you imagine yourself to be clinging fly-like to a vertical wall at dizzy heights. But for the energy and skill and implacable resolve of Saunders Philipson I am perfectly certain we should never have got through at all, and even he couldn't prevent the ponies from succumbing one by one to the tremendous work on scant fodder. Also, two of the *tagliks* lost their lives in one day, slipping under their load and falling down a deep ravine.

Worst of all, the *obo* hadn't appeared, although by Philipson's calculations we should have found it by now. Philipson kept up a dogged confidence, but I could see that even he was getting uneasy. He decided, before casting around, to push straight ahead for one more day's march. This we did, and it was our worst day yet. Two ponies dropped dead, and two of the remaining bearers disappeared—where, we never discovered, though it is likely they lay down to the drowsy rest from which there is no awakening, and were quietly left by their own fellows. At last Philipson, who was on foot ahead, halted with a great cry.

"This is the pass," he shouted. "The *obo* is at the top end of it."

But when we came to the place it was five or six feet deep in drifts, and nobody short of a diviner could have said whether the *obo* was there or not. It was too late to investigate now: dark was coming on. We retreated down the rugged slope and pitched camp.

That night our thermometer went down to five degrees below zero, but the morning rose clear, with the warmest sun we had known for a week past. The whole party set to work digging, with any tool that came to hand, but it was to the sun we owed our discovery. Brisk runnels of water began to tinkle away down the slope, the face of the snow sagged and caved, until there appeared, fully thirty yards from the scene of our blind efforts, a curious green blotch against the white. Philipson ploughed through the soggy mess towards it with a whoop of exultation, and a moment later the three of us were dancing round the *obo*, cheering like schoolboys. There was no doubt about it being the one we sought: you could see plainly the zigzag scratches where Philipson had scraped off the dead man's message.

WE WERE now in a regular fury to be gone. Perhaps not two days off was the end of our quest, the rim of that mysterious

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depression we had come so far to find. Philipson at once laid out his compass and set a course due west; but at that moment I observed a strange commotion among the bearers. They were gathered in a group at some distance from where we stood, and I saw one of them point to the sky with an expression of downright terror.

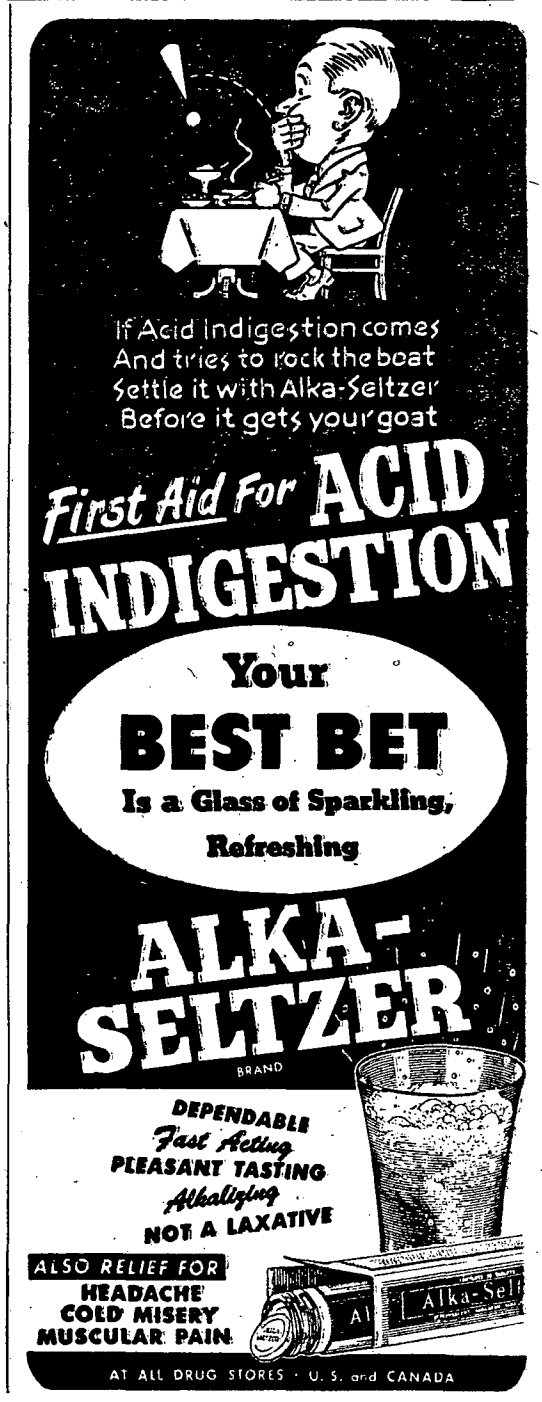
Excited as I was, I half expected to see one of the monstrous birds of the legend flap out over the peak surrounding us, but it wasn't that. It was a black cloud, no bigger than the cloud of holy writ, but curiously distinct from anything I had ever seen before. It was expanding swiftly under our eyes, and looked, on a gigantic scale, exactly like a big blob of ink that has fallen onto a blotter. But the really astonishing thing about it was the speed with which it was approaching.

"Great Scott!" gasped Poyning. "It's coming up as fast as a train!"

If I hadn't seen this type of cloud before, Philipson evidently had, and recognized it for something dangerous. He instantly ordered the tents, which had just been taken down, to be opened out and erected again length-wise—one wall of canvas five or six-fold and about six yards long. Every rope and peg we possessed we used to secure this one shelter, and concentrated our whole camp under the lee of it. These preparations were rushed through, but none too soon. With a shriek the storm was upon us, first a terrific blast of wind, then a withering burst of hail, then thunder; and after a while, when the very snow was scoured off the barren steeps by the force of the tempest, blinding clouds of sand and grit that stung the skin like spirits of flame. It was a brand of storm, as I say, new to my acquaintance, and even in the rush and howl of it all I couldn't help noticing with astonishment that although the thunder crashed like the splitting asunder of mountains, we saw from first to last no sign of lightning.

We crouched under the barrier, European and native alike, and it wasn't long in seeing the point of lumping all our canvas together. Any one tent by itself would have gone whirling on the wings of the storm, but this reinforced wall, though the canvas bulged as if it would split and the poles bent like reeds in a current, held; and after withstanding its first fury, gathered strength from the storm itself. Snow and sand banked up against it, forming a drift some seven feet high, behind which, so long as the wind kept to the one quarter, we could laugh at it.

The storm didn't rise. Nor did it abate. When once the thunder had passed, which was about an hour after the first squall, the wind settled down to blow steadily, gale strong, through the night. And that was a night of horror. By what I judge to have been ten o'clock we were as near frozen to death as men can be and still live.



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At last there came a little lightening of the dense gloom, which having reckoned to be daybreak, we rose to take stock of our situation. The pony was dead, as we knew he must be, frozen stiff and hard as iron. The Chinese servants and the bearers all appeared to have survived the night without frostbite; they had pooled their sheepskins and rolled themselves into one composite knot of humanity, which, in the circumstances, was about the wisest thing they could have done. The storm was still blowing great guns, and even by that murky light we could see an alarming change in the face of the mountain; nothing but lumpy drifts everywhere, and every crevasse filled with treacherous, powdery snow. Worst and crowning disaster, our chronometer and watches were ruined. The all-penetrating dust which had been swirling in eddies and backwashes behind our shelter all night had not only filled our eyes and ears and mouths; it had got into every piece of clockwork we possessed. In future we should be reduced to guessing time from the sun, if visible, and our position in a land as unmapped as the ocean, by the roughest of dead-reckoning from distance travelled.

The wind fell about mid-day, letting down a brisk fall of snow for some three hours; then the sky cleared, and we were shown the full direness of our calamity. Advance or retreat was out of the question till the snow thinned, and we set about pitching a camp in the normal pattern—pulling down our canvas wall and resolving it into three tents. This kept us busy till dark. An atmosphere of utter dejection was everywhere, which even Philipson's dogged energy and inspiration couldn't lift. For myself, it was useless to deny I had ceased to believe we could win through. Our one great hope had failed us; we had been counting all along on "summer" weather, whatever the difficulties of the route; but this terrific blizzard proved that such reliance had been mere vain imagining. I could see Poyning was a prey to similar gloomy forebodings, and I know from the look of the hillmen that if we got any more help from them it would only be because of their mortal terror of Saunders Philipson. The Chinese servants alone seemed to have no thought of retreat. They wore the fatalistic look of men reconciled to death, and content to humor their master's madness to the end.

That night there was again a terrific frost, but sheltered as we now were by a canvas wall on all sides, we felt it far less than before. At last, however, the cold awakened me, and sitting up, I was a good deal startled to see that the flap of the tent was open. I crept to it and looked out. In a direct line, and no great distance away, was the bearers' tent; and it seemed to me that instant that a figure was disappearing through their door. This was disquieting. If the hillmen deserted—as I made little doubt they would if a chance presented—they would get no wages except by robbery. Could it be that the man I saw retreating into their tent had just visited ours, and left the flap unfastened in his hurry? I turned to rouse Philipson and report my suspicions. This was queerer still. Philipson's place was empty.

NOW thoroughly puzzled, I wrapped my sheepskin tight round me and stole out. I could see nothing, and heard nothing at first but muffled snores and the swish of the night wind. Then there seemed to mingle with these sounds a low mutter of talk, some way away. I crept towards the sound. As I drew near, pausing at every step to listen, the noise resolved itself into something strangely familiar, which yet for the life of me I couldn't place. I was now so close that I could hear the words. I stood racking my brains to remember where I had heard the like before. Then it came to me, in about as curious a way as you could imagine. I had been feverish all day; now my eyes played me a trick.

The scene was transformed. The shadowy snow-draped mountain side became the verandah of our inn at Nanking, and I was listening again while Philipson spoke in that strange tongue that had so baffled me. The vision faded, but parts of it stood clear. I was actually looking at Philipson now. I had stolen to a sharp bluff of rock and was peeping round the angle of it; and there, not twenty paces from me, assuredly was Saunders Philipson; beyond him, half hidden by his form, something tall and white. Then he himself was hidden in darkness, as was everything else, for a cloud crossed the moon. At the same instant there came a violent puff of wind. When the moon shone out again I could see columns of snow, tall and white, being whirled up on all sides.

I withdrew softly towards the tent, but before I reached it there were quick footsteps behind me. I swung round.

"What the devil are you doing here, Mirlees?" demanded Philipson.

"I woke and found the tent-flap open," I said, "and came out to see what was up. But what are you doing yourself?"

He pointed to the sky, where black clouds were gathering as the wind freshened. "It sounded to me as if the storm was blowing up again," he said. "If it comes on like yesterday we shall have to get up and rearrange the tents."

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There was nothing to be said to this. It was a perfectly sound explanation. The only thing was, it was false. What Philipson's object could be in lying to me I couldn't fathom, though I lay awake pondering the mystery long after he was asleep; this much I knew, that for Saunders Philipson to depart from the truth, there would have to be some extremely potent cause. The wind continued to blow in gusts, but at last died down altogether, and I suddenly fell into a deep sleep myself.

When I woke, Philipson had already left the tent. I could hear him rapping out sharp orders to the bearers, and on going outside myself, I found him energetically superintending the work of striking camp. For the leader of an expedition in such dismal straits as ours he seemed in wonderful spirits. The hillmen were not so cheerful. They wore a look not only of despair but evident terror, and one glance was enough to tell me we were going to have trouble with them.

I bore a hand in getting the tents down, but suddenly there caught my eye something on the ground which held me stock-still, staring. It was a trail of footsteps in the snow, a double trail, as of someone going and coming; and it drew a straight line from the door of the bearers' tent to the very spot where I had stood last night when I peeped round the angle of rock. That vague form disappearing into the tent hadn't, then, been a trick played on me by my fevered eyes. Philipson had had another watcher.

We used our last sticks of fuel for a fire to cook breakfast, and when we had finished the meal, one of the bearers cringed up to Philipson and knelt down, beating his forehead on the ground. The man spoke, still with that curiously fixed expression of despair and fear that I had noticed on the faces of them all. Philipson heard him out, and dismissed the fellow with a quick word, whereupon he sprang up with alacrity and ran back to his fellows.

"You understand what the man said?" queried Philipson, turning to us.

"Not a word."

"He voiced the unanimous desire of the gang to leave our service and go home. I told him they would be allowed to do so."

The pair of us looked at him in surprise. "Great Scott!" exclaimed Poyning. "What on earth for?"

"Because," replied Philipson, very positively, "it was the one thing on this earth to do. I know that breed. I can stand the six of them in a row and shoot them here if I like, but neither I nor anybody else can make them follow us farther."

"Yet you thought we should have no more trouble with them?"

"I did. At that time they feared me more than anything else in the world. Now a greater terror has arisen."

"Why, what's up with them?"

"They believe the mountains are haunted hereabouts. One of them got up in the night and saw a devil."

I gave an involuntary start, and I am sure Philipson noticed it. I felt his eyes were keenly on me. "Superstitious cattle, are they not, Mirlees?" he said. "But one thing is absolutely certain: it is a waste of time trying to remove their superstition by argument. I shall pay them off and let them go."

Poyning looked bewildered. "How in Hades are we to get the gear along?" he said.

"Hump it ourselves. There will still be five of us to share it. Moreover, we can reduce the gear. *We have not much farther to go.*"

"What's told you that?"

The words were out before I realized I had said them. Philipson looked at me, and for one instant there seemed almost a shadow of suspicion, of defiance, in his eyes. But only for an instant. When he answered me, he might have been a city man mentioning the hour of a train.

"Plain common sense," said Saunders Philipson.

"PUT it to yourselves as rational men," he said. "The Tibetan Sbrang Chikya, who died on this spot, had strayed from his caravan, and he must have strayed a long way, since we are far west of any caravan route that I know of. Why he came in this direction, which was the least likely to lead to safety, I do not know, but it is probable that the mountains remained wrapped in cloud and he lost his bearings, only to pick them up again when he got down into the valley and saw the sun. You will remember he describes the valley quite definitely as west of this spot. But we must assume from the fact that he had left the caravan presumably without preparation of any sort that he had little food with him, and how far could a man travel like that in these mountains? Certainly not much farther than we are from the nearest caravan route at this moment. Therefore I say the valley of great birds cannot be much beyond this point. Is not that sound logic?"

There was no denying it was.

"Then let us get on at once and find the valley."

"Before the snow clears?"

"If we wait for that we may be merely waiting for a fresh fall. We must make a dash for it. The sooner we are off these heights the

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better. Never fear, I will find you a track!"

We paid off the bearers and parted company with them forever. If I wanted proof that Philipson really believed we were near the end of the trail the way he dismissed those hillmen would have convinced me: he not only gave them more than the stipulated wage, but all the surplus gear which, in his view, we should no longer require. They then filed off down the pass, heading northeast. We ourselves divided the rest of the baggage into five packs, and struck due west by Philipson's compass.

And now we came to a stretch of our journey beside which the worst that had gone before was mere pastime. Strive as I may, I cannot get clear in my mind the events of the next few days. I wouldn't even be sure how many days we travelled, for it is all a blurry nightmare to me, with nothing remaining distinct but a ghastly memory of constantly increasing cold and misery and exhaustion. What few facts rise up vaguely out of the confusion I have tried to reassemble and set down in order, but I will stake nothing on them.

It may be we didn't travel far as distance would be measured on the flat. There was no flat in that country to measure the distance on. All was sheer cliff or tremendous wall-sided ravine. The greater part of the time we seemed to be crawling along a mere thread of projecting ledge and looking down into awful abysses of rock and snow; and most perilous of all were the rare places where our route looked to be easier. We halted before one such, which I should have said was a moderately passable snow-paved surface of rock, but after some hesitation Philipson shook his head and turned aside.

We climbed a rugged scarp to the left, from which we could overlook the way we should have taken, and coming at length to a ledge broad enough to stand the five of us, Philipson stopped, picked up a fragment of rock, and heaved it over the cliff side. The stone clattered hoarsely down, then disappeared in the fluid powdery snow, which closed silently in over it so that you wouldn't have known the surface had been disturbed.

"It is well that I did not let you go on," muttered Philipson. "That means deep snow—an enormous drift in a ravine. Not one of us would come out of it alive."

He led on, picking a way with extreme care and, as it seemed to me, a perfectly uncanny instinct for safety, but at the best our advance was no more than a laborious crawl. Though the snow had evaporated off the more exposed faces of the mountain, the treacherous, swallowing drifts were everywhere, and there was a fantastic suggestion about it all of crossing a flooded country by shallows. Time and again we halted while Philipson, mistrusting even his own intuition, hurled great stones into the crevasses to estimate whether they were "fordable" or not.

Our last fire had been at the pass of the *obo*, and there, from the temperature of our boiling water, we calculated the elevation to be a little over eighteen thousand feet; and I am certain that from that point, though there were some deceptive drops, we worked in the long run considerably higher. Height-sickness and the consequent fever were now a normal state for us all, and though we benefited by the sedatives that Philipson dispensed, we remained in a sort of chronic delirium. So rare was the atmosphere that even the exertion of our creeping advance brought on a terrible breathlessness and distress; blood trickled continually from our noses and ears, and we had to call a halt at least once about every fifteen minutes.

These rests we took standing. Philipson would let nobody lie down till night fell; then two men remained awake at a time, to rouse the others before they had slept too long. We dared not allow any man to lie still for more than an hour at a stretch, or thereabouts, for as I have said we had no watches, for fear he shouldn't wake at all; and I am convinced Philipson would have had us push on night and day but for the sheer impossibility of negotiating those dizzy slants and ledges in the dark.

At last, weary beyond imagination, but with a tremendous thrill of renewed hope, we came into a long gully in the mountains. It ran between two vertical walls of rock, and though it descended sharply for a considerable way ahead, we could see nothing beyond it but a blaze of golden sky where the sun was setting. By common consent we halted in silence, and stared, and stared. I have never been nearer tears in my life. I seemed to lose my grip. Here, it looked, the mountains came to an end. There was a valley ahead, or at least a depression; if we had not found the object of our quest, we were to find relief from the frightful cold and exhaustion and height-fever of the last few days.

"It appears," said Philipson, in a queer, hollow voice, "that we are going to see our goal before long. Keep well in behind me."

He advanced cautiously, sounding the gully with the butt of his rifle as he went. Now in the far distance we could see peaks again, but they were right across in the eye of the sun; it became increasingly plain there was lower ground between us and them. Philipson would halt from time to time, and stare before him

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fixedly. Then we saw him drop the rifle and tear out his field glasses from their case. He swayed where he stood. A moment later he had turned a dead-white face to me and handed me the binoculars without a word. I took them mechanically and raised them to my eyes. Now it was I who staggered. The sun was by this time sunk half below the distant peaks, and its dazzle had faded. There, moving across the gold-washed sky, were several black specks, far away, but having through the glasses all the appearance of enormous birds.

Poyning had snatched the binoculars out of my hands and was looking for himself. It was the last thing he did that day. His strength, which he had forced to uphold him by an effort of will for which I should never have given him credit when he entered our lives at Nanking, now broke down utterly; he fell in a heap, unconscious, and though we managed to bring him to with the last drain of brandy we possessed, he was unable to move hand or foot. He lay in the snow crying like a child. It wasn't emotion—just his nerve-control completely gone.

Philipson looked at him and at me. "It is a pity," he said. "We must push on for the hour of dusk that is left—it may mean a couple of thousand feet downwards. I cannot let him sleep here."

Then without another word Saunders Philipson picked up Stephen Poyning and carried him in his arms. Lo Eng and I shared his pack in addition to carrying our own loads. It was in vain for me to offer to take a turn with Poyning. Philipson grunted angrily.

"Keep your breath for breathing, Mirlees," he snapped. "It is as much as the three of you can do to move as it is. We must get on the fastest we can."

I picked up his rifle and took the lead myself, feeling the way as he had done. At the end of the gully we had plainly come to the end of the heights, and there, deep down before us, we could see a blur of light. It was gloriously easier going now. The mountain side was steep, but of a fairly good surface, and we made capital headway. The relief was unspeakable, and came with startling quickness as we worked down off that frightful roof of the world into the denser air below. We filled our lungs with it again and again, and I felt it intoxicate me like wine. Saunders Philipson carried his burden for fully an hour and a half, and only stopped then, I am convinced, because dark had fallen.

WE PITCHED camp and put Poyning to bed, then turned in ourselves. There was no danger in sleep now. We lay down in our sheepskins and slept till the sun was high in the heavens of a glorious day.

And now we experienced for the first time the full thrill of our discovery. We were at the gates of an unknown land, a valley in this tremendous upheaved region of Asia which had remained hidden from the rest of the world all down through the ages. From where we stood outside our tent we could see the whole depression in a wonderful bird's eye view; above us, stupendous peaks towering into the sky, snow-clad and dazzling and looking not a musket-shot away; below, a long even expanse of snow running straight down to the line where snow left off and green vegetation began; farther down still, the cup of the valley, ringed round completely by mountain slopes like the one we stood on, a smiling green hollow, with a large lake in the middle of it and evident signs of human habitation. We could see through the glasses that the buildings of the city were uniformly white, but we were as yet too far away to descry anything more definite about them.

Poyning was vastly the better for his long sleep, and as eager to push on as I was, and though Philipson maintained outwardly the businesslike air of reserve that had never entirely left him, I could see he was in a tremendous exultation. As he might well be. To have brought us safely over that journey from Nanking to the spot where we now stood was a feat bordering on the miraculous, and if there was another man on this earth that could have done it, I had not heard of him.

"Breakfast first," he said, smiling. "None of us can afford to take liberties with himself after what we have been through. Then we will go down and explore, but we will load the rifles first. After all, we know little of these people. Who can predict what kind of welcome they will give us?"

After-events showed that we couldn't. Little did we dream how we were to be received by the folk of the valley, or even how we were to get over the last lap of our tremendous journey.

We packed up the two tents, and set out. Philipson's plan was that we should stalk the strange people very circumspectly, so that if they seemed hostile, we could at least beat a retreat up the mountainside as Sbrang Chikya had done; in which case it would be well not to have scrapped our gear. The stuff was a boon to us, later on, but by no means in the way we had expected.

We had been marching down the steep slant for about an hour when Philipson halted and looked from one side to the other with an air of considerable uneasiness. We asked him what was awry.

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He continued halted and looking, and then: *"That!"* he cried, stretching an arm out over the great expanse of snow.

At first I could see no reason for alarm, but after a minute or two I became aware that something was happening to the snow. A broad patch at about a hundred yards to our left moved. It slid downward for a few feet then halted; and I remember having at the moment a sort of fantastic impression that the snow was gifted with sense and stopped because we were looking at it. I had had many fancies, wilder even than that, during the past few days, and I make no doubt the others had too. But what Philipson now saw alarming in a little shifting snow, I hardly understood. It certainly looked harmless enough to me.

"I have noticed that once or twice since we started this morning," he said, "and I do not like it. There has been an unusually heavy fall—no doubt it came with the blizzard the other night. The mountains are top-heavy. There it is again!"

This time it looked more pronounced, and a lot less innocent. Almost up to where we stood the snow began to slide slowly and gently downward, a few feet at a time, then halting, but always resuming its curious motion at shorter intervals. Looking all round us, we saw that the slide was becoming more and more general; as far as the eye could reach, the great white mantle was sliding and stopping, sliding and stopping, rucking up here and there over a rise in the ground, with an effect like a gentle swell of the sea. Then at last my fuddled wits began to grasp what was really happening. There were millions of tons of snow on that vast mountain side. The layers next the earth were melting, causing the great mass to lose its grip. It would all slide soon. There would be an avalanche.

"Quick!" cried Philipson. "If we have something to keep us afloat we may have a chance—otherwise none. Take off your packs!"

We opened out the two rolled tents and folded them flat, into a sort of raft about five feet square, ribbing this with the tent-poles and rifles laid crosswise on the underside and lashing the whole tightly with guy ropes. There was barely time to complete the work before the rush was upon us, swirling round us thigh-deep for all the world like the surge of a strong current sweeping in over flat sands. We flung ourselves on to the raft, which immediately started to ride down on the shifting snow. For perhaps a minute the motion was pleasantly gentle. Philipson took advantage of this breather to allot us positions: he himself sat forward, holding the stoutest of the tent-poles, which he had kept out, in his hands like a paddle; Poyning and I were just behind him, grasping the ropes with one hand and Philipson's sheepskin with the other; while the two Chinese servants squatted behind us, their orders being to hang on like leeches themselves and catch any man who might be jolted out of his seat and swept backwards.

IT WAS a good move, turning our gear into this queer, toboggan-like contraption: without it, we should have sunk into the rapidly deepening, down-sliding mass, and been smothered in an instant. As it was, our raft for a time rode the avalanche to admiration, being too broad to sink in, and checked by the rib-like poles and ropes that went under it from adding the speed of sliding to the pace already given it by the moving snow. Soon, however, matters changed considerably for the worse.

The avalanche was gaining force and volume, but with a decrease in the slant of the mountain side the resistance was increasing, so that there became more and more evident a tendency for the surface snow to roll on over that deeper down. Three times we were struck by a heavy wave from behind and well nigh "pooped." More than once, grazing it by inches, we shot past a sharp snag of upstanding rock, against which the snow was breaking and spouting into the air in a high cascade.

It couldn't last. I imagine the avalanche had now reached a slope of the mountain not normally covered at all, and as the deep surge shallowed out, its surface broke, like rapids of a river. The gentle rustle of the snow when it started to move had now risen to a hoarse roar, like the roar of the sea but with a strange, muffled note in it more terrible than the crash and boom of surf. Philipson stuck doggedly to his steering pole, but there was no steering our crazy craft in that awful race. Jolt after jolt shook us, and at each one I saw Poyning and Philipson swing to and from me, as if we were on elastic. The ribs were clearly fetched adrift; there was no longer anything to stop the raft doubling up and being submerged. At last, with a fearful jerk, we were shot clean into the air. The shock of pitching threw me backwards, but I felt nobody behind me. Ah Sing and Lo Eng were gone.

"She will smash up now," yelled Philipson over his shoulder. "When it comes, keep your limbs stretched out stiff!"

The crash came almost as he spoke. The raft heaved up, then plunged, and I found myself whirled down in a tremendous roaring, suffocating mass of snow, with nothing in my hand but a fretted rope's end. I spread-eagled myself and stiffened my arms and legs, and I

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imagine it was to that I owed my life; for though I was often submerged to the point of stifling, I remained near the surface for the most part, and could get a deep breath now and again when some sudden upheavel of the snow-torrent threw me to the top. Once my heel struck something hard, and the leg became numb and dead from that instant on. Had I been rolling in a ball it might have been my head, in which case I should certainly not be putting this record on paper now.

I felt myself sink suddenly deeper. The snow rushed over me, I was madly fighting for breath, with a bewildered sense of plunging into the very bowels of the sea, at frightful speed. Then came a blinding flash of light in front of my eyes. . . .

I must have lain unconscious for an hour, for that's the time Poyning said it took him to find me. He had been much luckier. When the raft broke up the main portion of it remained, apparently, under his body and kept him riding afloat for fully a minute after the rest of us had disappeared. Philipson he lost sight of just after me, but he himself had been supported by the canvas to the end, until, with a blow that winded him but did nothing worse, he was brought up sharp in a hollow far down the mountain side.

The place where I lay was about two feet deep, but the snow was fast sagging and melting. I must have rolled here after the avalanche had knocked the senses out of me. I lay on my back in the soggy snow while Poyning opened my sheepskin and felt me all over for broken bones. Wherever his fingers pressed I ached and throbbed; the ankle I had struck in my descent was hurting abominably, and for some minutes I thought I should never rise from my back again. Poyning took off the boot and gaiter and wrapped round a rough-and-ready cold compress made out of a handkerchief and a handful of snow, which was a wonderful relief; and after a bit, with his help and using as a crutch the rifle he had picked up from the wreck of the raft, I found I could stand and just hobble.

The change from higher up the mountain was little short of astounding. In those few minutes we had passed from the arctic zone to the temperate, and farther down still there appeared to be yet greater transitions. Even here the air was oppressively hot to the lips after the icy heights we had crossed. The point we stood on was plainly a grassy slope well below the snow line, where the descending avalanche, thinning over some miles of snowless ground, had petered out by sheer force of distance.

It was well nigh impossible, looking at this regular scarp, to realize the tremendous ruggedness and cold and rarefied air of the mountain above, though the snow-clad pinnacles which ringed round the valley still looked deceptively near. Below us stretched the valley, broad, fertile, watered by the intensely blue lake plumb in the middle, and to judge by the warmth where we stood far above it, at least sub-tropical in climate. The white-walled city on the fringes of the lake was now much more distinct, and beyond this we saw, rising out of the grassy plain, several of the gigantic birds we had sighted from the gully last night.

Our first concern was to find what had happened to Philipson and the Chinese servants. From where we stood we scanned the slope in all directions, but could see no sign of any one of them. We then began a methodical search, binding together our two cast sheepskins and standing them up sheaf-wise for a landmark on the hillside, and working slowly up and down the slant at about thirty yards apart. I've said the mountain here was regular, which it was in the main, though there were any number of shallow basins in which an army of men could have concealed themselves by lying flat; but as we searched dip after dip and drew blank, lower and lower fell my hopes. Our comrades must have sunk into deep snow as soon as they fell off the raft, and even had they escaped death by battering in the avalanche, they must have met it quickly by suffocation. Somewhere under that great white cloak on the mountain side they lay, and not until the snow was gone, it seemed, should we find their bodies. Yet we kept searching still, hoping against hope, and so intent on the task that we were lost to what was happening behind us.

I heard Poyning raise a sharp cry. He was looking back over our tracks towards the place where we had left the sheepskins. There, gathered in a knot, were some half dozen tall, white-robed strangers, who stared at the filthy and unsightly garments, then at us their possessors, plainly in an extremity of surprise.

BUT if the strangers were surprised, we were startled. The appearance of them was matter for amazement indeed. Of the whole half dozen not one stood, I judge, less than six feet three or four inches in height, and the impression of great stature was accentuated by the fact that they all wore long flowing robes the hem of which swept the fast-melting snow at their feet; but it was their faces that set me gaping. Anybody with experience of native races knows that the Mongolian countenance, though it may vary greatly, always preserves certain contours and exaggerations which are unmistakable. These men

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were no Mongols. Nor was their skin, though ripely tanned by sun and wind, of the peculiar Mongol pigment. These men were a Caucasian stock. The hair of their bare heads, too, crisp and wavy and of a rich chestnut brown shading off into black, spoke plainly of Aryan races and the West.

Their leader, a magnificent old man who topped even his fellows by a few inches, was grey and austere, and he stood there with his beautifully chiselled features turned towards us in a long stare of inquiry. Then words passed between him and the others—apparently his attendants—and one of the most youthful looking took a few steps in our direction and hailed us. The words were spoken in a clear, resonant voice, totally unlike the throttled utterance of Asia, but listen closely as I might I couldn't place the language. We remained halted, wondering what was going to happen next. It was impossible to tell from the cold impassive demeanor of the strangers whether their attitude was intended to be hostile or friendly, but I knew well enough that the words that had been spoken were a command. The situation was getting irksome. Our comrade lay somewhere on that hillside, perhaps dying, and every instant we wasted here we might be throwing away his life.

"Plenty of time to converse with these statuesque heroes later," Poyning said, turning away. "I'm going to look for Philipson."

But the newcomers seemed to think otherwise. Three of them ran up and stood between us and the mountain top, waiting for the others to approach, which they at once did, the tall greyhead leading. They spoke to us again in that strange tongue I couldn't place.

Then I tried my stock of languages, which, so far as regions between the Caspian and the China Sea are concerned, is richer than most men's. I spoke to them in Tibetan, Mongol, several brands of Chinese, Turki, even in dialects of the Khirgiz Steppes that I had picked up some years before, but all to no effect. I made all kinds of excursions into sign language, but I was in such a fever of impatience that I make no doubt my gestures became merely wild and unintelligible.

At last I could stand it no longer. "You fools!" I blurted out in English. "The man's dying, and here are we gabbling like a lot of fishwives!"

With that I broke away from them. It was a futile step. Two of them were upon me in an instant, pinioning my arms in a grip of steel. Even without my game ankle I shouldn't have stood an earthly chance with those giants. I was dragged back into their midst. They spoke to us sternly, in the same elusive tongue.

Suddenly, Poyning began to struggle in the grasp of two of the men who had also seized him, and uttered some words that at once struck my ear with a curiously familiar note. I stared at him, as did the strangers, but a moment after they had released his arms and were nodding their heads with some appearance of comprehension. They answered him, speaking slowly and distinctly.

I listened to the halting dialogue, and the longer I listened the more familiar the sounds became. It was something that had reached my ears before, and that recently. Then, with a violent start, I remembered where. This language, or something very like it, was the one I had heard Philipson use on the balcony of Nanking, and again in the pass of the *obo*.

"What the devil are you talking to them, Poyning?" I cried.

He turned to me with an uncommonly excited look. "It seems that my qualifications can be of use in the East after all," he replied. "I have been speaking to these men in Greek."

Then it dawned on me. That was why the language had seemed so strangely familiar. I knew Greek, but not the Greek that Poyning spoke. I had learned to pronounce my Greek in the straightforward, almost phonetic manner of a schoolboy of the nineties. Poyning, coming later, had been taught the pronunciation that modern pundits imagined to have been used in the days of Pericles and Aristotle. Here was a race speaking Greek—apparently ancient Greek—in a way that Poyning, if with considerable difficulty, could understand. It must have been the most triumphant vindication of an educational theory in history.

"I have told them we have comrades yet to pick up," said Poyning, "and I have given parole that we will not run away. These people will help us search."

"But how in the name of riddles did you tumble to what they're saying? I don't understand a word of it."

"Nor could I for some time. It's a much more melodious version of the language than ours, and there are words I have to guess the meaning of, but once I got a hint what to listen for, it began to come clearer. God knows who these people are, Mirlees. They're certainly speaking classical Greek."

The strangers, directed by the tall greyhead, got into extended order with the silent precision of men accustomed to discipline, and worked slowly up the mountainside. We were soon back into deep snow, and it was hereabouts we made our first discovery—a melancholy one. A brown hand was sticking out of the white pall. A moment later I was looking at the dead bodies of our two Chinese servants, the faithful Lo Eng and Ah Sing.

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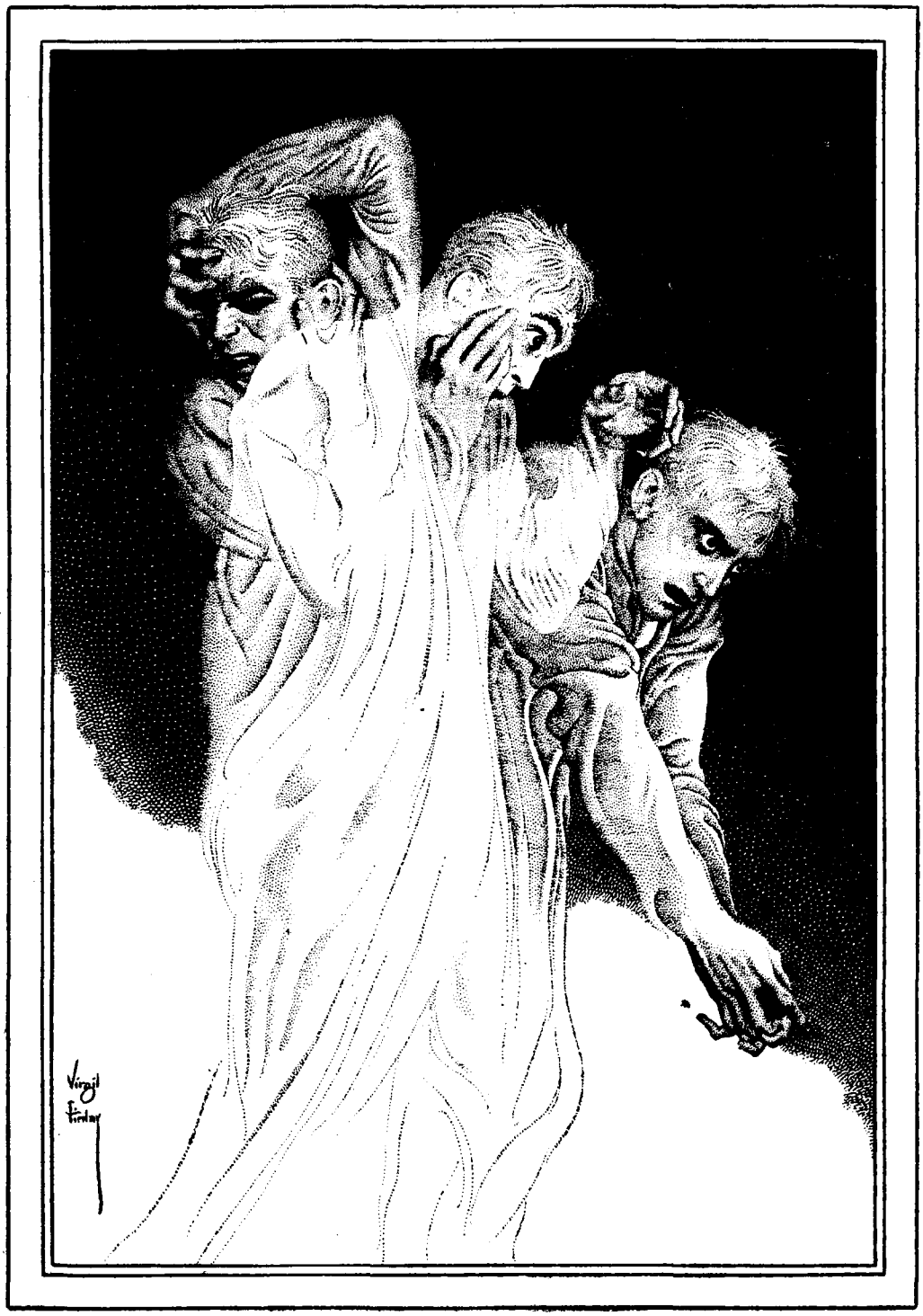

. . . that terrible anguish of mind. . . .

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They were bruised all over, but it seemed they had met their end by suffocation under the overwhelming torrent. A space was bared on the hillside, and the dead men laid out on it.

Poyning turned to me, his face twisted with grief. "Philipson must be lower down—buried, too, or we should have seen him," he said.

He spoke something to the old greyhead, who ordered the party to turn about. I now saw a body of men about thirty strong approaching, some of them bearing litters. How they had come to know they were wanted I couldn't fathom. The body of our comrade must soon come to light now, if only by reason of the melting of the snow, which was happening so fast that the lower slopes of the mountain already ran brisk with runnels of water. And yet the search was a long one. From the way the snow lay it had plainly been deflected this way and that by the varying slant; Philipson's body had no doubt been carried far to one side.

It was a shout from one of the newcomers that announced he had been found. I hobbled towards him, looking, yet fearing to look; but at this moment there was a most queer and unexpected diversion. Several of the valley men had run up and were on the spot before I could get near. I heard a cry go up from among them. They drew back, one and all, and *fell to their faces in the snow.*

THE sight pulled me up standing, but only for a moment. In my own excitement I didn't stop to wonder what it could mean, but pushed eagerly to the front and knelt beside our leader. To my unutterable joy he was alive. The face was white and drawn, the lips an ugly blue, but I wanted only a glance to tell me the breath was still in his body. Then, suddenly, I felt myself grasped by the shoulder. The tall greyhead stood over me and pulled me angrily away. There was no arguing the point. I was dragged back to a spot some distance off, whither the whole party, with the exception of greyhead and two men I took to be physicians, followed. Poyning had now arrived, and he too was sternly motioned not to approach.

He faced the stranger nearest him and put an indignant query. The man appeared to be, like all the rest, in a state of excitement barely controllable, but he muttered something in answer to Poyning, and I knew by Poyning's face that the hearing was good.

"Philipson will live, according to this fellow," he said, "but we are forbidden to go near."

We clasped hands in silence. Never till then had either of us realized to the full, I fancy, what Saunders Philipson meant to us—how we little short of worshipped the man, and what an irreparable calamity his death would have been. For myself, I felt at the same time a sort of vague, unreasoning jealousy against these strangers who seemed determined to take him from us. Something similar was clearly passing through Poyning's mind.

"These people, Mirlees," he said to me after we had been kept standing there a matter of five minutes, "are behaving with a coolness that comes perilously near to cheek. Damn it all, whose friend *is* Philipson?"

It seemed to me that the tall greyhead, who had joined us, started slightly at the name. He was scanning our faces with a curious intentness. Poyning spoke to him, whereupon he took on for the first time a faint flicker of a smile, and answered my companion with words in which I caught a note of sympathy; then his features resumed their stern, statuesque calm, and he reminded me of nothing so forcibly as some beautiful Grecian marble.

"Whatever the reason is," I whispered, "they seem to be vastly taken with him. You weren't here when they found his body. Poyning, every man jack of them plunked down onto his face!"

He gave me a queer look. "I wonder," he said, slowly, "whether Philipson knew more about this place than he ever told us? Supposing, for instance, he had ever been here before—"

I instinctively turned my eyes toward the spot where Philipson lay. Although we weren't allowed to approach, no attempt was made to prevent us from looking at what was going on; and as we were barely twenty yards away, I can vouch pretty confidently for what I saw. The physicians had laid their case of salves and bandages on a cloth on the wet ground, and had placed against each of Philipson's wrists a cubical box in dark wood, about the size of a studio camera.

The notion that at once occurred to me was some form of electric battery, but later I had reason to believe that explanation fell very far short of the truth. A moment's reflection would have told me this now, for no sound came from the boxes, and no application of the crude material force we call electricity could have caused our comrade to revive as he now did. His limbs were stirring, and I distinctly saw his lips move.

The physicians detached the boxes and replaced them in one of the larger caskets. They were talking to Philipson now, and *he was answering them, with perfect fluency, in the language of this valley.*

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At last the physicians rose to their feet, made a profound genuflexion, and beckoned to the bearers of a sumptuous litter, who had come up the hillside towards them. Two other litters bore the dead bodies of Ah Sing and Lo Eng, and a fourth I was given myself, since with an ankle like mine I could hardly hope to complete the long tramp down into the city on foot. Philipson's litter traveled well ahead of us, and I saw that a bodyguard had at once formed round it.

As we neared the city, I realized more and more that my first impression of it had erred greatly on the side of undervaluation. If it seemed imposing from a distance, now it was of a magnificence hardly to be conceived. Every building was of pure white marble, which must have been plentiful in the surrounding mountains, and of a severe beauty and grandeur that simply took my breath away.

You had no need to ask yourself where this architecture had come from. It was Greek, magnificently and marvelously Greek. Long, broad avenues of marble delicately cambered, and fringed with pollarded cypresses of variety I'd never seen before, ran between the lines of buildings rectangularly as in the newest Yankee city, but broken here and there by gardens of sub-tropical plants.

Carved work in a perfection of outline abounded everywhere, in ram's-horn and fruit-basket capitals of the columns, in gleaming white statuary by the wayside, in marble friezes and caryatids of the buildings. You would have called this city a magnified and transfigured vision of Athens in the golden age, yet here and there were places where the architects had seemingly experimented with foreign styles. More than once my eye caught a glimpse of winged figures in bas-relief and the florid honeysuckle decoration, and those impulses, if my memory serves me, came out of ancient Assyria.

WE WERE soon into a part of the city that was thickly populated, and it was plain our coming had thrown the people into an intense excitement. We too had a bodyguard now; nobody was let come near, yet despite the distance and the mask-like reserve that seemed to be the common attribute of the whole people, we knew we were being scanned with a mighty, repressed curiosity. We could see this also: whatever about our comrade caused him to be saluted with reverence by the scouts on the mountain, that emotion was shared by the populace down here, among whom word of us seemed to have spread like blown fire in a brushwood. Philipson's litter was about fifty yards ahead. As it passed, the city folk one and all prostrated themselves, and the spectacle of these people lowering their heads to earth before a stranger from the outer world was, to say no more of it, a striking one.

The crowd, indeed, would have been imposing in any situation, for they were about as splendid a collection of human beings as I ever beheld, or could dream of. The long flowing robe, great stature, and clean-cut beauty of feature seemed to be universal; and so close the adherence to type that it struck me at once a newcomer's prime difficulty among this people would be the distinguishing one face from another. Doubles, thought I, must be plentiful, and I found afterwards that this was indeed so.

The valley couldn't have been more than a few thousand feet above sea level, for down here the air seemed to us, after our mountaineering, of a tropic heat. We were forced to discard our heavy clothes one by one, and these loathsome, travel-polluted rags the attendants solemnly carried for us. We must have cut a boorish and grotesque figure among these clean, graceful giants of the valley, but never a smile met us over our ridiculous appearance; if we had aroused a burning curiosity, little showed itself on the faces of these people but a grave, silent dignity amounting almost to awe.

We passed on, as if in some fantastic sleep-walking. One day gone, we had been fighting for bare life in regions of terrible cold and appalling desert solitude; now we were plunged into the midst of what was plainly one of the highest civilizations this world has seen. Time and again I tapped my knee sharply with the rifle that lay beside me on the litter, to make sure it wasn't all a delirious mirage of the mountains, but the vision, if vision it was, wouldn't disperse.

Poyning walked with wide-open eyes, muttering continually to himself. "It can't be real, you know," I heard him say. "We shall wake in a minute—in the snow. The gods are laughing at us. They've dropped us in a dream valley, peopled with phantom Olympians!"

"How in the name of mystery do these people come to be buried here?" I asked. "Why has the world never heard of them?"

Poyning pulled his wits together with an effort. "That's as deep a riddle to me," he replied. "But from what I remember of those ghastly heights—supposing we *have* left them—I should say the world hasn't had much chance to look into the matter."

I followed his gaze round the vast amphitheatre of mountains, which towered into the sky on every side of the valley. I am no

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geologist, and never harbored any kindness whatever for the layman who holds forth on sciences outside his ken. For that reason I offer no explanation as to how this broad, deep depression originally came to exist in the heart of the greatest upheaved region on our planet. I will be content to record soberly and barely what my own eyes saw: that the valley was completely mountain-locked, and apparently couldn't have been approached from any point with much less than the tremendous difficulty and hardship we ourselves had experienced in getting here.

Then, in one breath the pair of us raised a cry.

Away to the west, a flock of the gigantic birds were flying. And now, from this point in the centre of the valley, we were near enough to realize fully the stupendous proportions of those creatures. Not only were they bigger by far than any bird now extant in the outer world: they must have eclipsed even the greatest of the winged reptiles that have come down to us fossilized in the Jurassic limestones.

Poyning had halted, grasping the edge of the litter and staring spellbound. One of the attendants jogged him gently by the elbow, and pointed ahead, but Poyning shook the man off, sweeping the western sky with his arm and uttering something in the language of the valley. I saw the ghost of a smile on the attendant's face, and heard him answer.

Poyning stumbled on, biting his lips.

"What does he say?" I cried. "Have they a name for the things?"

"Yes," said Stephen Poyning, "and a very simple one. They are not birds at all. They are men."

CHAPTER V

THE SECRET OF THE HIDDEN RACE

I STARED at the great wheeling, swooping forms till I thought my eyes would have dropped out of my head. We moved on, but I was still gazing when the low gable of a building came between and shut them from our view, yet not by any manner of means could I bring myself to believe I'd been looking at men. That could only mean men flying on artificial wings. The flight of those creatures was, on a grand scale, the graceful, easy, perfectly poised flight of a gull or a swallow, which no human ingenuity could imitate. Clearly Poyning had mistaken what the attendant said to him—an explanation credible enough when I remembered that he himself admitted there were words in the language of this people that he could merely guess. And there, for the time being, I had to be content to let the mystery rest.

The crowd had steadily grown denser as we advanced, and our bodyguard had more and more difficulty in screening us from close scrutiny. The cumulative effect of these ranks upon ranks of gigantic folk was most peculiar: it gave me the impression that I was of dumpy stature, while Poyning, as I noticed from my place on the litter, looked a downright dwarf against such a background. In all that throng I saw no full-grown man under six feet, many stood well above, and giants of seven feet were by no means rare. Everywhere we saw the bare heads of dark brown or black hair, the wonderfully chiselled clean-shaven faces, and the penetrating black eyes of the men who had first met us on the hillside.

There were women in the crowd, too, clad not greatly unlike the men, but whereas the hair of the latter usually reached no lower than the shoulders and was sometimes even shorter, the women wore theirs in luxuriant coils bound over the nape of the neck. It was impressive and profoundly fascinating to watch these people. Not only was there on every face a dignity which, while it never became solemn, broke into lighter shades very seldom indeed, but the whole concourse moved with a superb, willowy grace that to my mind was poetry itself.

At length we came to a halt. Philipson's litter detached itself from the procession and disappeared through the pillared portals of a broad-faced building that reminded me of "restorations" of the Erechtheum of Athens, while we passed on to a house of similar cast, but smaller and plainly of less importance. The building was of one tallish storey, approached by a flight of low steps in white marble; Ionic columns supported the massive portico, with its blank cornice and gently gabled roof, and behind this, in the wall proper, a door of some dark wood gave entrance to the interior.

The tall greyhead, whose name we had discovered to be Kalliboas—that is the nearest I can get in our letters to the very musical way we always heard it pronounced—now led through to rooms that had been made ready for us. They were severe and undecorated, these chambers, but after the barbarisms of camp life in the Tibetan mountains they seemed absolutely luxurious. The walls were all plain marble, built in great blocks beautifully smoothed and united by a white cream-like mortar, very little of which appeared, however, as the blocks fitted almost face to face. The floor was likewise marble, bare, except for here and there a rug about half an

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inch thick, made of a fabric that was put to a variety of uses in the valley.

It seemed to me to be a sort of linen, extremely soft and fine in texture, and so woven and interwoven as to give it the stoutness of felt. This same lawnlike material was used to upholster the couches, the only furniture, which were built of the same dark wood as the house door. We discovered afterwards that chairs were unknown, and that the tables used for meals consisted of low platforms placed between the couches, the diners always reclining to take their food.

It seemed strange there should be no tables of our pattern, if only for writing purposes, but the explanation was stranger than the fact. Writing was comparatively neglected. I found out before I had been in the valley long that there was a drama among that community, and an exuberant literary art, but these were practiced for the greater part orally and in public; and so keen were the powers of memory commonly possessed, that writing for the sake of recording accurately was hardly necessary. What writing was done mainly took the form of decorative carving on stone. We had passed close by several examples of this on our way into the city, and if we still harbored any doubt as to the true origin of the language, those inscriptions finally dispelled it. The styles of chisel-writing were many, from straight-lined majuscules to the most ornate and flowing hand, but the base of it all was unquestionably the alphabet known to the world at large as Greek.

Two sandalled attendants appeared, crossing the marble floor with scarcely a sound, and to these Kalliboas turned us over with orders to see to our wants. We were taken to one side of the building, where we found a row of baths, each built into the floor and filled with enough warm water to float a grown man—even one of the giants of the valley—comfortably. The attendants relieved us of the rest of our travel-smirched rags, laid down a pile of towels of the ubiquitous linen-like stuff, and with a word to Poyning, whom they had discovered to be our linguist, they went.

Poyning crowed with delight as he stared at the water. I am open to admit that I was grinning—at Poyning. I couldn't help it. When I remembered the dandy figure he'd cut during the earlier stages of the expedition, and saw him now after weeks of forced abstention from washing, the contrast was irresistibly absurd. His hide was scaly with filth.

Poyning glared at me. "They don't appear to go in for mirrors here, Mirlees," he said rather severely, "or you'd see you are in a pretty loathsome condition yourself."

I looked around the bathing chamber. "They don't seem to go in for soap, either," I said, "and that's worse."

"Eh? No, apparently not. The fellow made no mention of what we were to wash with. I suppose the idea is to lie and soak. Here goes!"

He flung himself into the water and stretched his limbs with renewed crows of delight.

I watched him for a moment or two, until something in his appearance attracted my gaze more insistently, and I stared with such intentness that Poyning demanded what was up.

"What does the water feel like?" said I.

"Gorgeous. Why?"

"Look at yourself, man!"

Poyning looked. He jumped out of the water as if he had been stung, then stared down at his own limbs and up at me in bewilderment.

"Ye gods!" he gasped. "You saw me before I got in, Mirlees. I'm not dreaming, am I?"

"If you are, I am too. You were filthy as any Tibetan. It must be something in the water."

I got into one of the other baths, and saw the same startling purification overtake my own grimy limbs. I am convinced, too, the water had not only the trick of cleansing like magic, but some strange healing virtue; it left the body with a sense of supreme comfort, the skin soft and smooth; and if there was any unpleasant after-effect, I never observed it, though I used these baths daily from that time on. As I lay there, the dull throb of my injured ankle melted gradually away, not to return. And perhaps the queerest part of it all was that the water looked as clean when we got out as when we got in.

AT THE very moment we had dried ourselves the attendants reappeared without being summoned, in a way that reminded me strongly of the way the litter-bearers turned up on the hillside; and we were taken off with the formidable stubble then disfiguring our chins. Here again that strange healing water took the place of soap. A white marble basin of it was given us, together with a curious sort of vegetable sponge and half a dozen razors with straight handles of rock crystal, looking more like surgical knives than an outfit to shave with. Yet we had to admit that the operation, which one of the attendants performed for us, was swift, painless, and effective. The servants now brought us each a suit of the very simple lawn garments and sandals we had seen everywhere, which having put on, we were taken back to the main hall to eat.

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The meal was simple in the extreme, consisting only of delicate white birds and plain vegetables, yet I had never in my life eaten tastier food. The birds were rather larger than pigeons, and the vegetables, though I couldn't give a name to one of them, seemed not greatly unlike the lettuces and artichokes and what not that figure in our European bills of fare. In the method of cooking, however, there must have been a wide divergence, for though the stuff was presented quite plain, somehow or other a most exquisite flavor had been imparted to it. I may say here that every meal we afterwards ate in the valley was hardly less simple than this one, and that we throve mightily on the plain diet. The natives themselves regarded anything in the way of elaborate food with absolute detestation, and even their banquets were what we should call Spartan in their simplicity.

After the discomforts of camp life we made no bones about eating a meal lying down, but it took us aback to find nothing was given us to eat with. Even in the roughest stages of our tramp across the mountains we'd never been reduced to less than a clasp-knife. The food now laid before us, however, had already been divided into handy mouthfuls, and was moreover totally free from grease, and we soon got over our scruples at adopting what appeared to be the custom of the valley—to eat with the fingers. We ate, and continued eating in a fashion that must have startled the attendants, for they had to reload our platters three or four times before we were satisfied. There was no other course, or anything else at all except a white wine, which was mildly intoxicating but didn't arouse, so far as I could ever detect, any inclination to drink more.

Poyning pushed away his platter with a long sigh. "So much for the belly-need," he said. "I would the hunger for knowledge could as easily be sated. It's about time the elderly gentleman who calls himself Kalliboas came back to enlighten us a little on this valley of the Grecians."

"I can't get it comfortably settled in my mind they are Greek," said I, "or how in Hades they got here, or how long they've been in residence."

"For that matter," replied Poyning, "I can't altogether rid myself of an idea that we shall wake up on those ghastly mountains in a minute. But if it *is* real, these people are certainly Greek. I'm an honors man, Mirlees, but I may tell you I little expected ever to meet my old Olympians in the flesh. We must ply the ancient Kalliboas when he comes. I'd also be glad to hear how Philipson finds himself."

But we were to make no more discoveries that day. The long-delayed reaction against our tremendous exertions and perils of the past few days was hard upon us. We must have fallen asleep simultaneously, and been carried to bed by the attendants, in a log-like insensibility; and then we slept the clock round *twice*. Whether it was wholly a natural sleep, or in part prolonged by artificial means for our benefit, I don't know; I have a very shadowy recollection of coming half awake once and seeing Kalliboas beside my couch and hearing him speak to me, but I didn't wake fully till the sun was high, and then I learned on the indisputable testimony of the servants that it was the third day from our falling asleep.

We were now both as full of energy as we had been at the beginning of the expedition, to say nothing of ravenously hungry again; and we breakfasted on food similar to that of our first meal. Hardly had we finished eating when Kalliboas appeared.

The old man saluted us with the stern courtesy he invariably showed, and began to talk to Poyning, slowly, in the language of the valley. The conversation had to be translated to me sentence by sentence, but by the end of it I was already beginning to get a hint of the modifications I must make in *my* Greek to follow the speech of these people. I may say that within a week I was able to stumble along with it myself a little, and before the month was out I could understand most of what was said to me.

Our first inquiry was, of course, for Philipson.

"You will see him today," said Kalliboas.

"Is he well?" demanded Poyning.

The old man made some answer at which Poyning started slightly.

"What does he say?" I cried.

"Philipson's perfectly well, according to him. But I notice *he speaks of him as the Prince.*"

We remained staring at one another for an instant. "And I have more than a notion the old gentleman does not welcome questions on the subject," continued Poyning quietly. "We must go slow."

I too had noticed an enhanced stiffness in the old man's manner, as if he was a little scandalized, and he had certainly looked very straight at us when the name Philipson caught his ear. Why this should be so I couldn't guess, but there was very palpably something about him that warned us to drop the subject. Poyning accordingly did so, and began asking the old man questions about himself and the city in general. He answered frankly enough for the most part, though we didn't take long to grasp that there was a point beyond which we weren't going to get enlightenment from him. What we did learn was this.

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All the people of the valley bore names which, like his own, would be recognized easily enough as Grecian by any student of classical antiquity. Kalliboas was headman of a ward of the city, and as such wielded considerable power. He was responsible to the rulers—Poyning told me he used a plural here, but omitted to specify who the rulers were—for the education of all children and for the administration of the laws. It was astonishing to us to hear him describe this legal system. No copy of the statutes, said Kalliboas, existed in writing. They were carried in the memories of the people—not only of the rulers and headmen of wards, but also of the common people, being taught to children as soon as they came to a comprehending age, so that most citizens could repeat the laws of the city by heart. It seemed incredible that any state, however small, could be run on such lines, but Kalliboas assured us the system worked smoothly and well.

The laws, he said, were not a whit the less existent for being unwritten, and they were backed by a very strong public opinion; each child received such education and training in matters of conduct that when he grew up he knew better than to transgress against what the general sense held to be fitting behavior. If he did, officers were detailed to remonstrate with him, and Kalliboas told us that on more than one occasion in the history of the community the delinquent had been able to bring forward such valid reasons for his unorthodox act as to cause the law to be altered. From a sort of grim horror the old fellow betrayed when he spoke of wrong-doing I inferred that crime in our sense of the word was very rare; and he left on our minds a vague, fearful impression as to what happened when the state was driven, in the last resort, to enforce its will.

AT FIRST I had been inclined to picture Kalliboas as a priest, but I soon found that was a misconception. In this community there was no priesthood strictly on all fours with that of the outer world, for the very simple reason that there was no religion—or at least nothing in the way of religious dogma imposed upon the people. Absolute free thought regarding the position of man in the universe was enjoyed and encouraged, and though, as we found when we were able to go into the subject more deeply, the great mass of the people held unanimous views on such matters, it was only because the wonderful knowledge possessed by their scientists and commonly shared by the whole community tended to lead them in the one direction. I shall write more about their science, later.

Kalliboas startled us a good deal when he told us he was ninety-seven years old, but there could be no doubt about the figure, for Poyning got him to repeat it. Though grey-haired, he stood as straight and moved as supply as an active man of middle age.

"There were many old men among the people you saw when you were brought here," he said. "Some well beyond one hundred years. We are born into this valley in health, and live in harmony with nature, and are without sickness."

It occurred to me afterwards to wonder why the people, if they were such a healthy race as Kalliboas represented, had never overflowed the margins of the valley; and I hadn't studied them long before I came to suspect they had some very effective method of keeping the population stationary, though what it actually was I never discovered.

"What do you call your state?" inquired Poyning.

"We call it Hellas."

"That is what in our country we call Greece. But there is still a Greece, far beyond the mountains, which is the same country as the Hellas of old."

I saw Poyning's face suddenly fixed in a gape of amazement.

"What is it?" I cried.

"He says," replied Stephen Poyning, *"that they are well aware of that."*

There were two of us open-mouthed now. It was our first inkling that this hidden race had knowledge of the outer world. Had we known then how that knowledge was obtained, I make no doubt we should have gaped more.

"How did your people come here in the first place?" asked Poyning at length.

"Our forefathers came over the mountains," replied Kalliboas.

"And are we the first strangers who have ever penetrated the valley?"

It seemed to me that Kalliboas was looking very queerly into Poyning's face when he said this.

Also, the old man's manners had grown suddenly stiff, and he now rose as if ignoring the question or not hearing it at all.

"Come," he said. "It is commanded that today you shall witness an important event in our history. We will depart."

It was a day of brilliant sunshine. Outside the guest-house we found the broad streets thickly lined with city folk, who presented a distinctly imposing effect with their universal white robes and bare heads. The crowd was plainly excited, yet there was always that air of grave restraint about them, and though conversation was general it never rose above a

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loud hum. We followed Kalliboas to a point where the buildings fell away on all sides, leaving a big circular space paved with marble and ornamented in the center by a statue I took to represent the Winged Victory. Thus far, but not a step farther, the crowd came.

I saw no cordon barring the way, and heard no order given: they simply seemed to stop of their own accord, and I could only suppose it was one of those strange unwritten laws we had heard about that forbade them to advance. We ourselves passed on into a neighborhood where the architecture increased in size and splendor, and at last came to a halt before the largest, certainly the most magnificent building we had yet seen. Like all the others, it was pure white marble, of perfect proportion and design, yet the carving of its Corinthian capitals and friezes in high relief distinguished it even in a city of superb architecture. I would say, without fear of exaggeration, that it was the greatest masterpiece of chisel-work now extant upon this earth.

A large throng had ranged themselves on the steps before the building, and from their age and imposing mien I inferred these men to be the dignitaries of the city; yet even among persons of such obvious consideration the arrival of Kalliboas created a stir. Our coming was the signal for the whole body to mount the steps and enter the building. We found ourselves in a large hall filled with soft light from windows of wonderful carven tracery at the sides, and floored with marble slabs so broad that for some time I couldn't detect a join.

There was a solemn hush in this chamber, where all remained in perfect stillness. Never have I felt so lost as then, when we stood, Poyning and I, in the midst of this levee of giants, many of whom topped me by a head, while Poyning could hardly have reached to the level of their breasts. There was a long wait, then, at some sign I couldn't see, the assembly moved forward with a curious whisper of soft leather sandals over the marble floor.

We filtered through a cloister of marble pillars into an inner hall, larger than the first and dimmer. Each man now dropped to his knees, whereupon we, at a sign from Kalliboas, did likewise; and as everybody remained kneeling, I was able, by leaning to one side, to see across the hall where two thrones, both occupied, faced us. There advanced from one side an immensely tall figure, whom I shall call the high priest, though as I have already noted in the case of Kalliboas the term priest is really a misnomer. The seated forms rose and knelt before the thrones, still facing us. I caught the gleam of something bright against one of the dark heads. It was a circlet of gold. The man who wore it raised both hands and removed this from his head, handing it to the high priest, who straightway laid it on the brow of the other. There could be no doubt what we were looking at. It was a ceremony of abdication.

At this point the scene became wrapped in a curious mistiness, to which for some moments I couldn't assign a cause. Then I saw it was a very fine gauze curtain that had swung silently across the building between us and the two thrones. I was so engrossed in this that I didn't notice what was happening behind, but when I looked again, one of the figures had vanished, leaving the throne empty. The high priest now withdrew to the side of the hall; then he returned leading by the hands a woman, tall and queenly, as could be seen even at that distance and in that twilight, who mounted the vacant throne. The pair stood together, then knelt, when once again I saw the gleaming circlet of gold removed and proffered to the high priest, who laid it on the brow of the woman. Then came across the dead silence a mutter of words solemnly intoned, which continued for some minutes, after which the kneeling pair resumed their thrones.

Of that much I have written confidently, but of what followed I cannot be so sure, though I have striven my hardest to extract a coherent picture of it from my jumbled recollection. Somewhere in the great hall arose an elusive, solemn music, like instruments played with muted strings. Then not only did the scene before us grow clearer by reason of the lifting of the gauze curtain, but in some mysterious way the whole place was suffused with brighter light. For perhaps ten seconds those two magnificent figures were clearly visible to our eyes. I remained staring, fascinated, until I realized that all the rest of the assembly had laid their foreheads on the cold marble floor.

I have a confused sense of pacing back towards the doorway and the brilliant outer sunlight, and of Poyning's dumbfounded look as he walked beside me in the middle of the crowd. I knew that he, like myself, had recognized the newly throned prince as the man we had known as Saunders Philipson, but the other and more startling recognition he couldn't have made. It was that, I imagine, that caused me to need Poyning's supporting arm on the way out: things were swimming round me. In the brief interval of light, before I bowed my head with the rest, I had looked up and remembered the countenance of that glorious woman. And unless I had gone blind or mad, *she was Philipson's mysterious visitor of Nanking.*

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KALLIBOAS led us back to our quarters profoundly impressed, but a good deal more mystified by the double rite we had witnessed. It seemed to have left him, too, in a frame of mind more solemn than usual, and when at last we ventured to ask him questions he almost gave me the impression that he judged the event too sacred to be talked about. He told us, briefly, that we had seen the coronation and betrothal of the new prince of the state, and at once drew behind that impregnable barrier of reserve which I couldn't for the life of me bring myself to assault. And not another word did we get from him. This was unfortunate for our peace of mind, for when we reached the guest-house Kalliboas abruptly left us and we saw no more of him for several days.

I sat on the edge of the couch racking my brains for a solution of the mystery, but the more I pondered, the more bewildered I got. Not till now had I felt to the full the loss of that great clarifier of the brain, tobacco: I would have given worlds for a good leaf to compose my jumbled ideas over. But tobacco there was none. During the last stages of our ghastly journey across the mountains we were completely out of it, and the weed seemed to be unknown here in the valley. I remember reflecting how queer it was that a people plainly so skilled in the arts of life shouldn't have discovered it, and promising myself that if opportunity offered I would one day go out into the valley, where it might be the tobacco plant grew wild and unheeded, and come back to them like a new Raleigh bringing that one vice of this world which is a virtue.

On the second day, Kalliboas still being absent, I fell to wondering what was the reason of it, and why he had been so chary of telling us anything about the abdication ceremony after we had apparently been counted fit persons to witness it. To this also I could find no answer at the time, though after-knowledge made the matter clearer. Kalliboas, as I now see, was closely occupied elsewhere, and I don't even know that his desertion of us was intentional.

However these things might be, it seemed my best plan to get ahead with the language, so that I might dispense as soon as possible with Poyning's sentence-by-sentence translations. I told Poyning, who told one of the attendants that I wanted a language professor, and the request was acceded to without much difficulty.

I now made swift progress indeed. At Edinburgh I had enjoyed some repute as a Grecian, and though my knowledge had become heavily overlaid with the many oriental tongues I had studied in the meantime, I now found it came back to me easily enough. The prime trouble was, of course, pronounciation, but when we were stumped over this we referred to writing. And thereby hangs an incident which, as it turned out, I was to be unpleasantly reminded of later.

When we came down in the snow-slide most of our possessions naturally went missing, but I had been carrying what I regarded as my most precious piece of property next to my skin. That article, a hide-bound notebook, I still possessed. In it were recorded the events of our journey, and since arriving in the city I had filled several pages with our more recent experiences. Now, when I needed paper to write the disputed sentences of Greek, I produced this notebook and used a blank leaf at the end of it, and I couldn't help noticing that the old man who was teaching me stared very straight at that volume. At the time I took this to be caused by the sight of a strange foreign object, but afterwards I was driven to suspect there was more in it than that, and that I should have been wiser to call for a slate—which was the implement used by the folk of the valley on the rare occasions when they wanted to write.

As day followed day and still Kalliboas didn't appear, we got more and more tired of this virtual captivity, and at last Poyning told one of the attendants point blank that we must go out for exercise. The attendant took us, not to the street, but to a courtyard of the building, and remained close beside us with a purpose there was no mistaking. Poyning demanded of the man we should go farther afield, but he gravely shook his head and replied that it was the order of Kalliboas we should wait his return here. There was no getting over this. We knew little enough of the valley, but we had gathered that Kalliboas figured importantly in it, and I think both of us felt he was a person whose orders it would be extremely unhealthy to disregard; so we bowed to the inevitable with the best grace possible, which, to tell the truth, was an uncommonly bad one. Poyning paced up and down continually, like a caged wild cat, and seemed to have matters on his mind that he wouldn't confide even in me.

I also spent a deal of time in the courtyard, from which we could catch glimpses of the populace without, and hear their subdued talk and see from time to time in the distant sky the monstrous bird-shapes that were still an unsolved riddle to us, but for the most part I buried myself in the study of the language, where, at least, there was satisfaction of a kind to be got out of this harassing delay.

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OF PHILIPSON we saw and heard absolutely nothing. I was peevishly inclined to blame him for this, but Poyning, despite his own nerves, took a more generous view.

"Depend upon it, Mirlees," he said, "Philipson would come if he could. I have a pretty shrewd notion there is more happening in this valley at the moment than we know anything about."

"What's to prevent him coming?"

"I make no dogmatic assertion. But from what I saw of that rather picturesque ceremony the other day I would venture a hypothesis that the said and so-called Philipson, having been for reasons best known to themselves received by this people with such extraordinary favor, is now state property and no longer master of his own movements. That's my way of it, anyhow."

At last, on what I think was the eighth day, Kalliboas came. He seemed, or it may be pretended himself totally unconscious of our burning impatience to get out, greeting us as if he had only been an hour gone; and when lunch was brought in, with an additional couch for him, he reclined there slowly and delicately sipping his wine and eating as if it were no way unusual for strangers to be brought into the city and imprisoned after getting the barest glimpse of it.

"We have many things to ask you, Kalliboas," burst out Poyning at last.

The old man returned a suave, measured reply, which I found to my delight I could understand.

"I await your questions," he said.

"Your people are of Hellene descent, are they not?"

"Hellene blood runs in our veins."

"So. Now we ourselves know the original Hellas, which is many thousands of miles from this country. How did your people come here?"

"Have no fear, the time is not distant when you shall learn of our origin. But tell me, how did yourselves come to this country? Was it by design or did you stumble upon us?"

I am tolerably sure Kalliboas was already in possession of all the facts about this, and that he merely wanted to hear our version of it. Yet he started and bowed his head realistically enough when Poyning mentioned Philipson.

"Our comrade," said the former, "came of a set purpose. He had discovered evidence that somewhere in this region lay a valley inhabited by an unknown people. He determined to search for that valley. Together with us and the two native servants who are now dead he set out across the mountains."

"What guided you here?" asked Kalliboas.

"A monument in the mountains, on which was a record of this land. The writing had been made by a priest who penetrated into the valley but retreated at once into the heights, where he perished. We found the monument again, and from there struck across the mountains until we were carried down into this valley by the snow."

The mention of the *obo* had put the old man into a perturbation which even his mask-like reserve couldn't altogether hide.

"Do others of the outer world know of this monument?" he said with a curiously grim inflection.

"We do not know. When our comrade found it on his former coming he copied the inscription and then effaced it, so that probably only we know what was written."

"How, then, did they obtain their knowledge, those other men?"

"What other men?"

"They from whom you fled when you came hither."

Kalliboas may, of course, have learned of this matter from Philipson. On the other hand, he may not.

"I cannot tell," said Poyning, staring at the old man. "But in some way they had come to suspect the existence of this valley, and believed our comrade had more exact knowledge. They strove to steal his secret. But tell me, Kalliboas, are we the first men from the outer world whom you have seen?"

The old man shook his head. "There was one before," he said.

"What manner of man was he?" cried Poyning with a curious eagerness.

"He was tall, and of a fair skin like yourselves."

"Then he was *not* the native priest who made the inscription?"

"He whom we knew was no priest."

"Whom you *knew*? Then he too has departed again?"

"On a very long journey. He died in this land."

"He is buried here?"

"We judged him to have been a man of standing in his own country, and our rulers decreed that his tomb should be of a fitting splendor."

"Where is it?"

"It stands on the foothills southward of the valley."

"When did this stranger come?"

"Some years gone—ten, eleven years."

"How long had he been here when he died?"

"But a few months."

"How did he die?"

"No man saw his end. The body was found on the hills, unwounded, and word passed in

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the city that the stranger had died from a bursting of the heart, in climbing."

Poyning rapped out these inquiries in a way that got me distinctly alarmed. It seemed inevitable the old man must resent being thus brusquely cross-examined—there is no other word for it—and I noticed that he was indeed scanning Poyning's face with that curious intentness he had shown when the subject of former explorers first came up. I did my utmost to catch Poyning's eye and warn him to go lightly, but his head had fallen to his breast.

"You are much concerned for the stranger who died," said Kalliboas at last.

Poyning looked up and gave the old man a look as straight as his own. "He may have been of our race," he said. "We would at least go to his tomb to pay honor to the dead."

"So," said Kalliboas. "But it may not be yet. The foothills to the southward are still impassable by reason of much snow which has recently fallen. But come, it is the will of the prince that I should show you our city. You have asked to know more of the great birds you have seen in the valley, and to learn how our people first came here."

We followed him into the open and struck out westward on foot, skirting the margin of the lake and making towards a broad grassy plain from which we could see the gigantic birds rising into the air. News of us was, of course, by this time general in the city, and I noticed that as soon as we emerged from the guest-house we were watched at courteous distance by a considerable crowd, who only desisted when Kalliboas ordered certain city wardens—the closest approach to police I ever saw in the valley—that we were to be pursued no farther. We must have walked a mile at a round pace—the old man was astonishingly vigorous for one of his age—and at last drew near enough to discern the true nature of these gigantic wing-flapping figures.

"Then they *are* men!" cried Poyning.

"Not so," replied Kalliboas. "They are boys. This is the school where our people are taught the art of flight."

We were so close now that we could see several pairs of great wings lying on the ground beside a knot of youths in white skin-tight attire. They were gathered round an older man, whose voice we heard raised in the level tones of a set lecture. Our arrival caused no little commotion: the boys drew away from their tutor and ranged themselves in a half-circle, staring towards us with the liveliest curiosity. I make no doubt we were more interesting to them even than the art of flight was to us.

AS KALLIBOAS approached, all saluted him with a profound obeisance, which having gravely acknowledged the old man obtained a pair of the great wings and had them held up while he explained the principle of their use. Much that he told us of the origins and development of flying in the valley I omit for brevity's sake. Suffice it to say that the people had, some hundreds of years back, after a long and systematic study of the feathered creation, begun experimenting in wing-building for themselves, designing their implements so as to unite the best points they had observed about the wings of the best-flying birds. They were soon in possession of a wing that would support the flier in the air, but the perfecting of the pattern and the elimination of accidents had been a work of years, and to this day experiments were still made.

The wings, we saw, were of very thin, very tough skin, ribbed with some rigid horn-like substance which Kalliboas told us was hollow and hermetically sealed full of a light gas. The buoyancy thus derived was merely an adjunct, however, and should one of the ribs become punctured and the gas escape, the flier was in no danger of falling, since he depended for support in the air almost entirely on wing-purchase. When in use the wings were worn on the shoulders, being hinged together by a most ingenious device on the principle of ball-and-socket joint; there were thong loops on the under side of the main rib, through which the arms of the wearer could be slipped in or out at will, and lower down a light framework serving as a rest for the feet during flight. The distance from tip of the wings Kalliboas showed us was something over twenty feet.

When he had explained their construction he bade the tutor select a boy to demonstrate how the wings were used. A youth of about sixteen years was chosen. As he came forward, I noticed a faint trace of a smile on the face of the tutor, and when the demonstrator had donned his wings and stood waiting, the other pupils broke into a downright cry of derision.

The tutor quelled this outburst, and turned to us.

"I have chosen this boy, O Kalliboas," he said, "that the strangers may see what our least skillful can do. He is my most backward scholar. See, he waits for a favorable wind. No bird does that."

The youth flushed on hearing these words. He at once put his wings into a vigorous commotion, then threw his weight forward, poising on tiptoe at about forty-five degrees, and in another instant had swung clear of the ground. The wind-puff came, on which he soared almost still, and had risen to a hundred feet in surprisingly little time. When the

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current failed he climbed with a flapping of his wings to another, higher and higher, until at last the tutor had to shout at the top of his lungs to make the boy hear.

It was a command to descend and demonstrate the way of other maneuvers, which the boy did, gliding down, wheeling, plunging, soaring, and finally, at a word from the instructor, coming to within about ten feet of earth. He then seemed with a sudden effort to shake the wind out of his sails, so to speak, and alighted so gently that I didn't hear his sandals touch the ground.

Whatever the tutor may have thought of the performance, to our eyes it was bewildering, marvelous. I had all I could do to refrain from clapping my hands.

"Tell me," cried Poyning, "how far can these boys travel on their wings?"

"But a little way," replied the old man. "I do not think there is one student in the school who could fly out of this valley without becoming weary. But when long distances are to be flown we use other wings than these."

He spoke a few words in a low tone to the instructor, who nodded and gave a curt order to the boys nearest him. They ran to a large pavilion-like building near where we stood, threw open the doors, and carried out a pair of wings wider and apparently much heavier than those we had seen. I noticed at once that at the point where they joined, instead of the simple metal hingeing there was a curious shield-shaped contrivance, about eighteen inches broad by nine deep.

"These wings," said Kalliboas, "demand higher skill and strength than the others. No student is permitted to touch them until he has thoroughly learned to fly by his own exertions."

The tutor himself had donned the wings and risen into the air with an ease and grace beside which, as we now saw, the performance of his pupil had been merely elementary. For about five minutes he amazed us by evolutions that brought my heart into my mouth time and again: he somersaulted like a gymnast, tumbled like a tumbler pigeon, swooped almost to the level of our heads, then rocketed up as if he had been shot out of a catapult, and finally seemed to poise dead still in mid-air. He was making some readjustment of the wings. These immediately began to flap with swift sweeps, and the flier to hurtle down wind at a prodigious speed. During the few short minutes we watched him he must have traversed the whole width of the valley. He at last re-approached, glided to within a few feet of us, gave the wings that curious shake we had seen the student employ, and sank gently to earth.

When the wings had been taken off him and laid on the ground I examined that queer "carapace" at the hinges, but could come to no intelligent conclusion about it. Two thin bars of metal the color of aluminum but, I imagine, much tougher, projected from the shallow carvel-sided box and were hinged to the main ribs of the wings. It was through these the power came, obviously, but whence that power arose in the first place—

I turned to Kalliboas with an inquiry on my lips, but the look of him froze me to silence.

"Come, let us go," he said peremptorily, and led us back across the plain. I was vividly conscious, as I had been conscious before, of something in his manner warning me that it would not only be useless but unwise to press him further. Clearly that strange force was a secret we weren't to be allowed to penetrate. The visit had one profitable sequel, however. Both Poyning and I extracted a promise from Kalliboas that we should learn to fly ourselves, and learn we did, making a beginning the very next day. But our experience in the air, and the queer consequences that arose from it, I reserve for a later chapter.

Such, then, was the mystery of the gigantic birds that had been seen in the air over this land of secrets and possibly far away from it, for it seemed likely from what Kalliboas told us that at one time and another scouts had been sent beyond the confines of the valley. I fancied then that this might account for the knowledge these people possessed of outside countries, but I know now that they had other and stranger resources.

WE CAME in time to a neighborhood near the middle of the city, which we hadn't yet visited, and here Kalliboas led us into a great walled courtyard, circular in shape, its center an obelisk rising high out of the marble floor. The monument was beautifully carved from top to bottom in Greek character, so freshly preserved that I believe we could have read it without the help of Kalliboas. The old man was looking at the inscription with an expression of the profoundest reverence.

"On this stone, strangers," he said, "is recorded how our people first came to the valley. It would take long to repeat all the tale as it is written, so I will tell it you in my own words more briefly. You are perhaps familiar with the name of the great hero of old, Alexander of Macedon?"

"He is known to us as the great Alexander," replied Poyning.

"Mankind called him great, and with reason, for assuredly he was the greatest man this world has produced. To us of the valley his

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memory is a sacred thing. He was the founder of our race."

Poyning's face was blank with incredulity. "What you say is new to us, Kalliboas," he said. "History as we know it records that Alexander came far into the East, but never so far as this."

"There is much in the life of our founder which your history does not tell, I believe," returned the old man, with a shade of irony. "What is the account your historians give you of his death?"

"He died at Babylon," said Poyning, "of a fever. This happened in the three hundred and twenty-third year before what we call the Christian era. Alexander of Macedon was never within a thousand miles of this valley."

The old man seemed more deeply moved than I had yet seen him. For a moment the statuesque reserve was gone, his face flushed, his eyes blazed, his usually suave gestures took on a sudden convulsive anger. Then the mask had fallen again, but when he spoke it was still with a stern conviction which proved beyond doubt that whether we believed his words or not, Kalliboas profoundly believed them himself.

"It is a lie," he said. "It is the greatest delusion in the history of the world. Listen, strangers, and you shall know the truth, even as it is written on this stone.

"In the year of which you speak, Alexander of Macedon was returning from greater conquests than mankind had ever known, but it is not for the magnitude of his victories this should be revered. He was more than conqueror. For years he had seen visions of a splendid future for the world, of a uniting of its forces, of a fusion of the peoples of the East whom he had conquered with the peoples of the West from whom he sprang, a union without which the races of this earth would ever remain in half-complete fruition. It was to the realization of this ideal that he devoted his life and his mighty spirit.

"What came of his projects, perhaps even your historians know. Gradually, sorrowfully, our great founder saw that the world of his day was not ripe for his ideas; his own people regarded them as fond imaginings. They saw in him only the marvelous leader, the means to certain victory and boundless plunder for themselves. Disillusionment more and more bitter came upon him: the visions which had inspired his vast conquests fell away one by one as he understood they could not be carried into effect. Worse, his sympathy with the peoples of Asia led to jealousy, discontent, then plots among his own followers.

"Their love for him had waned, their faith given place to greedy ambition and hate. At his bidding ten thousand of his men took wives from among the women of the East, but to them it was still the light union of conqueror with slave chosen from the conquered race. His best friend among the generals of his army, Hephaistion, had died, leaving him almost alone in the midst of a swarm of traitors awaiting only the moment to revolt.

"There had been many designs upon his life. At the city of Babylon a plot was laid to slay him by secret poison, and when knowledge of this came to him and he learned that the most fulsome among all his courtiers, the infamous Antipater, was ring-leader in it, his mighty heart broke. He determined to flee from this hotbed of treachery, strike out into the unknown, and found a new kingdom where the barbarian jealousy of Europe against Asia should not be. The plot gave him an opportunity. The poisoned food was privily destroyed, but the king feigned to have eaten of it and to be dying. His common soldiers, loyal to him still but understanding the true greatness of his mind no more than the generals, were admitted to the presence for a last view of their commander, who simulated approaching death before them.

"Then came the end. One plot had been met by another. Secretly, the king's place on the royal couch was filled by a youth like to him in form and feature even as his own beloved Hephaistion had been, who had died of a sickness two days before. The body of the youth was shrouded with a pall, and it may be that your historians record the truth, that no man ever saw the face of Alexander after his death. The king himself lay hidden in the innermost apartments of the palace, while the news of his death was noised abroad.

There was, as he had anticipated, small difficulty in withdrawing secretly from the city. When asked who should succeed him he had answered, 'The best among you,' well knowing that among those he left behind there was none worthy to rule a satrapy, much less the empire; and he had truly foreseen that in the confusion of the fight for pre-eminence which would break out as soon as his death was announced, he might depart without knowledge or suspicion.

"With a small faithful band the king left that polluted court of Babylon and journeyed swiftly eastward. He had resolved to go beyond the uttermost limits of his former campaigns, that no tidings of him might reach back to the cities of Persia and give rise to fresh plottings and strife, yet even so his passing was not wholly unknown. The wild races which dwell to the west of us recognized him as the great Grecian conqueror, and paid him divine honor, so that to this day they call by

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the name of Alexander all things noble and great. So much we know from our scouts, who have at rare intervals visited those regions.

"The band, Grecians and their Asian wives, came at last to the great mountains which encircle our city. They suffered grievous hardship and peril, and their numbers were reduced by their sufferings, but there was ever with them the leader whose mighty soul could sustain armies, and in the end some fifty men and women reached this valley. Dreams had told the king that there lay a fertile land beyond the great snows, and this, it seemed to them all, was the land which the king had dreamed. Here he built his city, and I tell you, strangers, that there stand in the city to this day stones which the great king had touched with his own hands. These names"—Kalliboas pointed to the marble pedestal of the obelisk—"are the names of those devoted men and women who followed him across the wilds. Here they settled and prospered, and we who dwell in the valley today are their descendants.

"The king lived to see the young state multiplied far beyond the numbers which had accompanied him, and when at a great age he died, he left these words with his people."

Kalliboas again pointed to the obelisk, and read, word for word, this astounding passage:

" 'Not until the world is ripe to hear shall the secret of this land be made known to the world. In my life I have striven to unite the races of Europe and Asia, but I have failed, for the world was not ready. Barbarism and jealousy were too heavy upon it: the world has not understood my thoughts. But there shall arise in the years to come a generation more enlightened. Till then, I charge ye my people to hold aloof from the world. I go now to the nether shades, but I shall come again. Let you and your children's children remember.' "

THE old man shot a keen glance from one to the other of us. "This is strange hearing to you, doubtless?" he said.

"It is monstrous!" I cried. "It is impossible! We have been taught—our people have believed down through the ages that the man we call Alexander the Great died in Babylon, and that his body was borne in an alabaster coffin to his own city of Alexandria, which stands beside the Nile. There, our historians say, it was laid with great pomp and ceremony in the mausoleum called Sema."

"That a coffin was carried from Babylon into Egypt on a car of gold and that it was deposited in our King's own city," said Kalliboas, "we ourselves know. That it was the body of Alexander was universally believed by his generals, and by his Baktrian wife Roxana, who at the time of his supposed death lost no time in murdering her rival the Persian Stateira, that her own son might succeed to the empire. Our King thought well to leave the murderess to a vengeance which was not long in overtaking her crime. He himself was already gone far eastward when that funeral procession set forth from Babylon towards the west. The body contained in the coffin was the body of a youth whose name, Krantor, has perhaps never been heard by you."

We were silent for fully a minute. It was staggering enough to have the history I had believed as gospel thus torn to shreds; but when I came to reflect that I, Ronald Mirlees, had stumbled into company with a man who was not only to penetrate this mystery but seemed to be himself so strangely involved in it, I had some difficulty in fetching a breath.

"Tell me, Kalliboas," I said at length, "what manner of man do you conceive our comrade to be? To us he is known as a traveler in the East—for my part I believe him to be of my own race, which the world calls British. For what reason have your people received him in such honor and placed him so high?"

Kalliboas looked at me with surprise in which there was more than a hint of disdain. "Can it be," he said, "that among those from whom you come there is so little knowledge of the great conqueror? Is there no statue, no carving upon metal or stone, which enables you to recognize our king?"

"You mean—" we cried together.

"I say," broke in Kalliboas, "that the man whom you call by your barbarian name of Philipson is no other than our own lost king who has returned to us after the years, Alexander of Macedon."

Nothing was said by anybody as we walked back to our quarters. Kalliboas, as it seemed, was quite content to let us believe his amazing statement or not as we chose. We were silent because we simply found no words to say. From that far-off day beside the Yangtze River, when Poyning had addressed Philipson as Macedonian and justified his impertinent fancy by the fact that our comrade's features bore a striking resemblance to those of the great Grecian conqueror, I had pondered much in my mind upon the nature of Saunders Philipson. More than once already in this narrative I have recorded things which argued him to be far out of the common run of men. His astonishing physical beauty—not to be totally extinguished even by the very skillful native disguise I'd first seen him in—the force and intensity of his mind, his almost superhuman determination in following an object he had set his heart on, his strange power of inspiring affection and faith, his stupendous bodily

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strength—all had got me and kept me speculating in a vague, perhaps even fantastic strain about him. But that he should regard himself as the living incarnation of one of the greatest figures in history, and that the people most interested in such a reincarnation should promptly accept him as such—this set my brain whirling again.

"You have added enough to your knowledge of us for one day, strangers," said Kalliboas, when at last we had reached the guesthouse. "Let me now learn something from you. What moved you to accompany our king hither?"

It was on the tip of my tongue to blurt out something which, as I now see, would have been extremely impolitic, but luckily Poyning broke in.

"We are of a race which delights in strange adventures," he said. "When our comrade unfolded this adventure to us we readily joined him, for we believed he was a man who would accomplish much."

This answer seemed to please Kalliboas greatly. "You had faith in our king?" he queried.

"We had great faith, which was justified, for I do not think any other man in the world could have brought us over the mountains as he did. But now, Kalliboas, it is long since we saw him."

The old man drew back his head sharply.

"Surely," went on Poyning with a little heat, "we have some claim upon him? We risked our lives in coming here, when few men even of our race would have followed him on a journey so full of uncertainty and danger. Though he is your king, to us he is still our comrade, with whom we went through much, and whom we greatly love. He, surely, will not deny us an audience?"

I don't know that the old man approved of Poyning's free words, but he seemed to relax a little at the evident sincerity with which they were spoken.

"Our own people, even our greatest, have audience with the king seldom," he said, rising. "Inquiry shall nevertheless be made."

WHEN Kalliboas had gone, Poyning sat for a long time on the edge of a couch, drumming his fingers on his knees. I spoke to him once or twice, but he returned nothing but absent monosyllables, and I could see from the look on his face that his thoughts were neither clear nor pleasant.

"This will never do, Mirlees," he burst out at last.

"What do you mean?"

"We must have a plan—present a united front. We were within an ace of disaster today. When he asked our reason for coming here, you very nearly let him know *your* reason. I could see it."

I began to catch Poyning's drift. "That would be unwise, of course," I said.

"Unwise? It would be suicidal. I've had my eyes open since we came here, Mirlees, and I can see this much with absolute certainty: we are not *personae gratae* in this state. The people greatly rejoice at getting back their king, as they call him—but they would sooner have had him come alone. There's a palpable atmosphere of suspicion whenever *we* move."

"You think so?"

"I do most decidedly. Look at the facts. These people find us, strangers, on the hillside. What is the first thing they do? They take very good care that we shall not run back by the way we came. It is not till they find Philipson also, and recognize him for their lost king, that things become easier for us. Why? Because, I take it, they thought we were his servants like the Chinese and might be trusted not to run away. But as soon as they learn more about us, suspicion brews again, and we are under arrest for a week. Then, apparently, Philipson having vouched for us, we are given more freedom and shown more secrets. I don't imagine that would have happened unless they were satisfied those secrets were safe in our keeping, and what does that mean? *That we must stay here forever.*"

Poyning was striding swiftly to and fro, clenching and unclenching his hands in a curiously agitated fashion. Suddenly he halted, and stared. There, framed in the doorway, stood Kalliboas.

"Inquiry has been made," he said. "You are to be received by the king within a few days."

Poyning bowed in silence, and the old man was gone.

"It's a tall order," said Poyning with a queer look at me, "but I wonder if our ancient friend knows English?"

"I'm beginning to be shy of assigning limits to our ancient friend and his people," I said. "But for the future we shall do well to discuss private matters in a whisper. I never heard Kalliboas approach then."

"Neither did I. But it was uncommonly odd he should turn up at the moment he did."

The promised audience with Philipson was the better part of a week in coming, but at last, one morning just after we had finished eating, Kalliboas came to announce the king was waiting us. We were swiftly carried in litters to the royal palace, where we mounted the magnificent marble steps, and passed into an outer hall, and there, at the bidding of Kalliboas, took off our sandals and followed him to the inner apartments. Kalliboas immediately threw himself on to his face, signal-

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ling us to do likewise. It seemed a pretty squalid thing to grovel in this fashion to a man with whom we had traveled so far on a footing of perfect comradeship, but I think we both realized it would be a bad move to demur.

We heard light steps across the hall, and felt ourselves touched on the shoulder. There stood Saunders Philipson before us, his long white robes setting off his face and figure to admiration. He greeted us with that wonderful grace he always had, bade Kalliboas go, and a moment later was chatting with us as frankly and informally as if the strange wheelings of fortune of the past weeks had never been.

He had motioned us to the lawn-covered couches of the apartment, three of which were laid so close together in a triangle that we could speak quite comfortably without raising our voices. We talked English.

"How do you find yourselves?" was Philipson's first question.

"We are very well looked after," I said. "But we ought rather to inquire for your health. You caught it pretty hot in the snow-slide, Philipson."

He seemed to cast his mind back, as if to something that had happened a great while ago. "Ah, yes," he said. "The avalanche. If it had not been for my two faithful comrades I do not know that I should be here now. I have heard how you got the search party and found me. That adds one more to the already long list of services for which I have to thank you."

"We did little," said Poyning. "But the doctors who attended you did much. It amazed us, Philipson, to see the way you recovered."

As Poyning spoke I saw him raise his head. His eyes opened in a wild glare of stupefaction. He was looking at something over my shoulder. Then I swung round on my couch, and looked for myself, and came near fainting.

The Chinese servants, Ah Sing and Lo Eng, stood behind me.

CHAPTER VI

THE HALL OF WANDERING SOULS

I ROSE to my feet and swayed like a drunken man, a furious throbbing in my temples and buzzing in my ears. For an instant I fancied we were the victims of an illusion; yet the men looked solid enough, and there was no doubting the way Ah Sing dropped a knee to the floor and saluted us with his old ingratiating grin.

Philipson turned to the servants. "You are to speak to Mr. Mirlees," he said, "and convince him you are real."

"You, Lo Eng," I said, "do you remember what happened to you?"

"When we got well, Mr. Philipson asked for us," he replied with dignity. "We live in the palace and wait upon him."

"What about you, Ah Sing?"

The Celestial's grin broadened. "Ah Sing fallum one big bang," he said. "Him tinkee die. Nex' time him sabbee, *tai-fu* hab come, makee numbah-one topside pidgin. Gib Ah Sing plenty good dlink. Jus' now him headum walkee plopah, no makee seeck."

Then the pair of them withdrew. As body-servants to Philipson they were clearly enjoying some consequence, and I couldn't help feeling that in the bow they gave us there was just a shade of patronage.

"What does it mean?" I cried, staring at Philipson. "We thought those men were dead. They *were* dead—or what we've always been taught to call dead."

"That is just the crux of the matter," he replied, gravely. "What one has been accustomed to regard as death. The world we came from is rather easily satisfied on that point, but the physicians of my people here hold other views."

I noticed throughout this interview that Philipson had dropped into speaking of the people of the valley as his, as if he had never belonged to the outer world. Also, while I have written his words in fluent English, this was not how we heard them. Often he paused at a loss for an expression, and strange though it seemed to us, it was none the less manifest that Saunders Philipson was already beginning to forget the English tongue.

He must have sensed what was passing through my mind. "And how do *you* manage with *our* language?" he inquired.

"Poyning had it pat almost from the first," said I. "I've got a decent hang of it myself now—like him, I'd learned the language at school, and I had only to adapt it the way it is pronounced here. But you, Philipson, were perfectly familiar with both words and pronunciation before you came."

He started at the directness of the remark. "You knew that?" he queried sharply.

"I heard you speaking to the doctors who attended you on the mountainside," I said, "and—"

His eyes were on my face as palpably as if he had touched me with his fingers. "And—and that," I concluded, "seemed pretty conclusive."

Philipson preserved a tense silence for about half a minute, as if debating with himself.

"You have been faithful comrades to me,"

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he said at last, in a low, earnest voice, "and it is time for you to know the whole truth. That you have not learned it from me before is only because I was myself not sure—only the upshot of this adventure could reveal the truth, and before I have finished you will confess that I had good reason for hesitating to speak out. It is enough to say that I knew I was more than I purported to be when I met you. Upon you I practiced a deception which I have practiced on the world at large—if deception it could be called. I told you my name was the rather humdrum British one of Saunders Philipson. That was the name I had adopted in England, where I was educated and became a naturalized Englishman. But I was not of English birth. I was born in Greece, near the modern city of Salonika, and was known to the people of that region as Alexandre Philipides.

"The surname had been borne by my family from very early times, and was held by us, among other evidences, to indicate our descent from the ancient kings. From my boyhood I had brooded deeply on the circumstance of my ancestry. I had also dreamed strange visions—I think your English expression "voices" would best describe these visitations—all of which seemed to tell me my destiny lay in the East where some great mystery lay waiting to be revealed to me. Sometimes there would seem to be a voice speaking in my ear and calling to me, sometimes a human figure rose before my eyes, and once, gentlemen, I solemnly assure you that I dreamed a vision of the magnificent panorama of this valley exactly as it burst upon our view when we emerged from the mountains a few weeks ago.

"By the time I came to man's estate my impulse to travel in the East was irresistible, and my parents being then both dead, I set out on my quest. In my mind I had put together all the evidence of my visions, and it seemed to me that somewhere among these tremendous mountains lay the heart of the mystery which I was destined to discover. I explored the wild interior of Asia in a way that no other man living has done, and then at last I came upon that strange inscription of the *obo*. You already know how I secured an interpretation of it, and you need not be told of the exultation I felt when I recognized in it a solid confirmation of all that my visions had told me. Then, Mirlees, as if the gods were determined to aid me, they threw you in my path, and later, you, Poyning.

"Your help, I thought, would be precious, and if you will allow me to say so, I was not wrong in my expectations. I made known to both of you the secret of the *obo*, which I knew to be sound fact, but said nothing of my 'voices,' which, real, as they were to me, might only have disposed you to believe you were dealing with a madman. Then again, at Nanking, I had a vision so vivid that it convinced me finally I was following no mere chimera; and again in the pass of the *obo* came a visitation that I could not doubt."

PHILIPSON paused, eyeing me very keenly before he resumed his narrative. I imagine he was wondering how much I knew or suspected of these affairs already.

"Though," he continued at length, almost hastily, "once more I shank from communicating a matter so wild and incredible. And from then on, that vision was before my eyes night and day, leading me by safe paths. Otherwise, not I nor any other man of this earth could have found a way as I did over that last awful wilderness of snow. The rest is known to you. We came to the rim of the valley, and I knew it was the valley of my dreams. I think I should have told you everything on that last morning, but then came the avalanche, and after that, as you saw, I was borne away from you in the midst of a bodyguard. There now seemed to ensue several periods of unconsciousness, which I found afterwards were part of the treatment given me by our physicians, and when at last I came to my normal self I learned that I had been chosen king of this city. I asked for you and for my servants. The latter were brought to me a day later. I did not know then that they had been picked up on the hillside for dead, so their appearance did not greatly surprise me.

"I then inquired why you had not come to me. I was informed that the Nine Shadows advised delay. It was my first knowledge of the existence of that body, but from the way their name was mentioned, I realized they were a force to be reckoned with, and subsequent developments have more than confirmed me in the belief. Bit by bit I have come to understand my position. I can tell you it is by no means so simple as might have appeared to a casual onlooker the other day when I was crowned and publicly betrothed to a maiden of the ancient blood royal."

"You mean your power is limited?" put in Poyning.

Philipson leaned further forward and sunk his voice lower. "The situation seems to be this," he said. "The Nine Shadows are all-powerful. As soon as they had satisfied themselves I was the true Alexander who should come, they advised the reigning prince, Kalliphanes, to abdicate. 'Advise,'—that is the word generally used of the acts of the Nine, but I have already apprehended that it might be bad for the man who neglected that advice.

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Although Kalliphanes retired with apparently good grace, I do not know that he is reconciled to his retirement. He has behind him a faction, some of whom even question my claim to the throne, and though he can do nothing so long as the Nine are with me, I am disposed to venture little authority on my own account until my position is more securely established. So you see," he concluded, "it is not all honey to be king of the lost city of Hellas. But now tell me something about yourselves. What have you been doing all this while?"

"We saw the abdication ceremony," said Poyning, "but after that Kalliboas disappeared and we were little better than prisoners for about eight days. When he came back he told us it was your wish that we should see the city. We have already seen much. We have had the mystery of the great birds cleared up for us, and we have been taught something of the art of flight, and we know what it says on the obelisk of Alexander."

"That was good," said Philipson with quiet enthusiasm. "There you went to the very heart of our existence. So now you have seen the devils of ghostly face and the great birds. What else does the legend speak about? The white gems—have you seen them?"

Philipson saw by our faces we had not.

"Then it is obvious you have not yet visited any of our private dwellings," he said.

"How does that follow?"

"If you had, you would have seen the children playing with the white gems very much as your English children play with marbles. They come from the river which flows into the lake from the north-east. Sbrang Chikya was quite right about it. Diamonds as big as walnuts roll down its course by the hundred; the bed of the lake must be thick with them. You must ask Kalliboas to take you there, but I would suggest you do not betray any great excitement about the stones. Although my people do not hold such things precious they know that in the outer world the greed of men for diamonds passes all understanding; and they regard that lust with the utmost horror and contempt."

"That matter is still a great riddle to us," I said. "We've had plenty of hints that your people are not unaware of what is going on outside the valley. How is that knowledge obtained?"

His voice became suddenly graver. "If I tell you here," he said, "you will not be able to believe. Kalliboas will show you for yourselves, and much more to astonish."

We left Philipson shortly after this. His forecast was abundantly fulfilled. We did see much to astonish us, and much that I but vaguely understand to this day. I saw with these eyes the method by which this strange people informed themselves of the events of the rest of the earth—a sight which leaves me still amazed and bewildered, even sceptic; and yet on the other hand there remains the undoubted fact that they *were* aware of what was transpiring beyond their mountain barriers. Of that, at least, I am certain.

The day after our audience with Philipson, Kalliboas came to our quarters and bade us get ready to accompany him. It seemed clear enough now that Philipson's influence was making itself felt; more and more candidly did the old man answer our hosts of questions, and he even volunteered information on many strange matters the mere existence of which we hadn't suspected.

THROUGH the streets, fragrant with the aromatic scent of the bordering trees, we followed him on foot to a place about a quarter of a mile from the royal palaces, where we came to a courtyard into which, as it seemed, the populace weren't allowed access. It was a vast enclosure, with walls nowhere less than fifty yards from the group of buildings in the middle of it, and each of these was a good deal bigger than any single structure we had yet seen. In the main building, too, there was a marked difference in the design of the interior, its halls—and it had many—being built one within another like kernels of a nut.

Some chambers through which we passed, though panelled and paved with the magnificent marble we had grown familiar with in our own guest-house, were manifestly laboratories, containing scientific apparatus of a pattern entirely new to us; and in one passage near the center of the building we came upon a superb life-sized statue of the Pallas Athene, a deity I don't remember, curiously enough in a city given over to mental culture, to have seen portrayed elsewhere.

Kalliboas whispered to us here that we must preserve unbroken silence until we emerged again from these inner chambers. For myself, I found this injunction none too easy to obey: I could have cried out time and again with amazement over what we saw. In the first place I couldn't for the life of me fathom how these enclosed halls were lighted and ventilated, yet they were both. Sweet air, and a queer diffused rosy illumination pervaded them all, though I felt no draught that could have accounted for the clean atmosphere nor saw any lamp that could have furnished the light.

We had now entered a square corridor the wall of which was built with many cubicles, all small and furnished with bier-like couches

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of marble upon which lay forms in varying degrees of inertia. Some were already still and pale as the marble all around them, so that you would have said life was extinct, but in others we saw the trance-production—for such it was—in actual process. As the subject lay down on the couch he fixed his eyes on a curious bright blue spark in the low ceiling, produced I don't know how, but apparently by some gem illuminated from behind.

I looked at one of these things for some minutes, and most strange the appearance of it was: although the light in its immediate neighborhood was brilliant, in some mysterious way this did not radiate, so that the rest of the niche was no whit the brighter for it. The state of trance appeared to be secured very easily, and very profoundly. In one case we halted outside a recess while its occupant was in the act of lying down. He took no notice whatever of us, but at once concentrated his gaze on the blue spark in the ceiling and barely half a minute later was rigid, of a dead-pallor, deep in the self-induced sleep.

They were all ages, these trance-subjects, from fresh youth to grey hair; yet on all their features I noticed the one stamp of profound spirituality. Some of them moved their lips in sleep, muttering, and we came to one recess where an attendant had seated himself beside the trance-subject and was listening closely to his words—but not writing anything down.

The next chamber inward was the hub of the whole building. It measured about twenty yards square, and contained absolutely nothing beyond a pedestal of solid marble surmounted by a big globe of some glassy substance which radiated that curious rose-tinted light I had noticed everywhere throughout the building. The sight of this lamp was ordinary enough, but when I came to reflect what it meant, I could have fallen down in my astonishment. In the corridor of recesses we had just left, we had seen a brilliant blue light that didn't radiate. Here was a soft rosy light which had been visible to us for the last half-hour, *through endless walls of solid marble.* I had this explained to me afterwards, but I must in common honesty confess the explanation was beyond my scant scientific understanding, and the mystery of how this people contrived to enhance or stifle the radiation of light at will—to reverse, in fact, what we regard as the eternal laws of physics—remains a mystery to me still.

Kalliboas now took us back to the courtyard, and across to another building, from which came a subdued hum of voices. On entering the hall we discovered a large gathering of youths seated on low benches, and a tall greyheaded old man not unlike Kalliboas in appearance addressing them. This, it seemed, was the tutor. At a sign from Kalliboas the lecture went on, and although this elder spoke a good deal less measuredly than our old guide, I found I could understand him with a fair fluency. He was explaining to his students the secrets of the human mind; from time to time he would call out a pupil, hypnotise him with astonishing ease, and demonstrate to the rest the strangely exaggerated powers of a person in hypnosis. Then students were set to hypnotize each other, the most skillful being greeted with acclaim by their fellows, and the least accomplished, whose laborious long-drawn efforts reminded me acutely of performances I had seen on the public stage in Europe, witheringly derided for their clumsiness.

A youth Kalliboas described to us as leader of the school succeeded in reducing no less than six of his fellows simultaneously — an amazing exhibition; he seemed to retain absolute control of their minds, plunging them just as deeply into the sleep as he chose, and toying with his power as a child may play with a colored balloon. So lightly hypnotized was one boy that I thought the operator had failed to put him to sleep at all, and I remarked as much to the tutor, who shot me a curious little glance, half amused, half malicious, and requested me to question the youth.

This took me distinctly by surprise. I had imagined that all that was claimed for the youth was that he had been successfully hypnotized by his fellow student, in which case he might obey any command given him by the latter, but wouldn't necessarily be susceptible to any words of mine. Now it seemed the tutor wanted to represent him as not only hypnotized, but clairvoyant.

I felt Poyning jog my elbow. "Ask him," he whispered in English, "what the ground is like near the tomb on the southern foothills."

AS I put the question I knew the eyes of both Kalliboas and the tutor were on me very keenly. The boy hesitated for fully a minute, then murmured that streams were pouring swiftly down the slope. "I see also men working," he added.

I glanced at Poyning. His face expressed dry skepticism. I felt incredulous myself, and inclined to be angry into the bargain. I could hardly have believed that this people, who had so much to show that was genuinely wonderful, would descend to trickery for so paltry a purpose as impressing strangers, yet it seemed clear enough that was what had happened.

The supposedly hypnotized boy had thought

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—hence his long hesitation—what the hillside at that point would most probably be like now, and was offering his mere guess as an act of second sight. In any case, the test was unsatisfactory, as we had no means of verifying his statement. This I pointed out to Kalliboas, and the tutor again gave me that little half-malicious glance, which only deepened my suspicion that we were being bluffed. Before very long I was wishing I'd kept my suspicions under my own hat.

"We will give the stranger more convincing proof," said the tutor, rather grimly, and began questioning the hypnotized youth himself.

"What does the stranger carry under his robes?" he asked.

Without a moment's hesitation came the answer: "He carries a book."

"Of what kind?"

"Not our fashion."

"What does it contain?"

"Much writing."

"What does the writing say?"

"It is in an unknown tongue."

There was a pause. I thought now that I could see through the whole ingenious trick.

The tutor could have got the knowledge of my notebook in two ways: he might have seen the outline of it under my garments—though I didn't look down, and am unaware that it was particularly noticeable—or he may have learned from Kalliboas, who might easily have got it from my own language tutor, that I was in the habit of writing notes and carried the record next my skin. The very fact that the tutor had suggested to his student the idea of something under my garments argued that he himself had foreknowledge of the book, and that he was passing the knowledge on by a simple act of thought-transference. But for what followed I was quite unprepared.

The tutor placed a slate and a stylus in the boy's hand.

"You will now," he said very firmly, "copy the last of the writing that you see."

To my amazement the pupil at once began to write, slowly and laboriously. He filled about three lines, then stopped short.

"Why do you write no more?" demanded the tutor.

"There is no writing after."

"What are the words you have written?"

"I do not understand."

The tutor handed the slate to me. "Is that, stranger," he said, "the writing you have made in your book?"

I took the slate, and at the same instant nearly dropped it. The writing had manifestly been copied line for line like a drawing, and without comprehension of its meaning, yet it was perfectly legible. It read:

Poyning rather pointedly asks WHY we are not allowed to visit the tomb on the southern foothills.

I remembered that as the last entry I had made, and I could have kicked myself for making it, still more for having it brought to light now. We had by this time come, as I have already remarked, to the stage when we could believe pretty well anything of this uncanny people. What if they knew English? The sentence I had written was not particularly incriminating, but quite enough to give a hint of our mistrust, and to arouse mistrust in return.

To my surprise, Poyning seemed rather gratified than alarmed over the upshot of the affair. When he had read the writing he gave Kalliboas a very straight look in which there was almost a touch of defiance, and told him coolly enough that we were now satisfied with the test. Then we withdrew.

If the old man's suspicions had been awakened he concealed them to perfection. He threw himself on to a couch in the sunshine and began to talk as if nothing out of the common had occurred.

"You have understood all that you have seen today, strangers?" he inquired.

"Not everything," said I. "In the recesses that surround the great hall many had cast themselves into the false sleep. To what end?"

"In that way," replied the old man, "we are able to know matters which take place at great distances from this city. Otherwise how should we, who have never visited the world of the outer peoples, know what they do?"

"Do you mean to say you *do* know?" cried Poyning.

Kalliboas bowed his head. "It is even so," he said. "And is that strange hearing to you?"

"Strange! It is impossible!"

There was a shade of the pity that is akin to contempt in the old man's answer. "Why impossible?" he said quietly. "Can it be that you are so steeped in ignorance as not to know that by far the greatest power upon this earth is the mind of man? The art of projecting the human soul was very early understood and practiced among us. Today, we have brought it to a high effectiveness."

"But how is it done?" I cried.

"You have even now seen our wise ones at work," said Kalliboas. "They induce the false sleep, and while the body lies on the couch, the soul goes wandering forth over the world. The sleep affects different of our wise ones in

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different ways. In some there is what we call the shadow soul, which goes abroad while the brain which gave it birth remains in relation to it at home, active, causing the lips to speak. A recorder is always beside those wise ones during their sleep. Others, who are the more numerous, only at the awakening know what they have seen, and record for themselves.

"Every day our wise ones are at work in those halls. Their visions are collected and compared; thus we build up a complete picture of the world. Not that the picture"—the old man's words rang out in scorn—"is often to be looked upon with profit, save as a warning to ourselves. Well we know how your peoples have lived and died in a squalid turmoil of cruelty and hatred and intolerance; how you have spurned and persecuted your wise and noble, and exalted your knaves; how jealousy and suspicion are rife among your races, how far you yet stand below the ideals our great founder held. But not wholly profitless are the soul-wanderings of our wise ones. Through them we learn of the few discoveries made by your few philosophers—though in truth there is little you discover which was not already known to us many centuries ago."

"Tell me, Kalliboas," I said, "are only your wise ones skilled in mind-projection?"

"Indeed, no," he replied. "Only those judged to possess strength, however, are elected novices at the Hall of Wandering Souls, to become eventually our wise ones, our scouts over the rest of the earth."

"And when one of your wise ones has projected his soul," I inquired, "could he be seen by any person of the outer world?"

"Only to the eyes of the soul can the soul be visible. How many of your outer world possess such vision? Yet to one possessing it, the vision must seem as real as an actual bodily presence."

"And could any other person see it?" I said, concealing my eagerness with an effort.

THE old man's glittering puce-black eyes were looking clean through me. "The point is an obscure one," he said, "and our wise men hesitate to pronounce upon it. We have strange evidence both for and against."

There was again that unmistakable hint in his manner that to question him further would be useless, and so far as solving the mystery of the queer episode at Nanking went, I had to be content then with what I had heard. I was determined to find out, however, how this people explained Philipson's advent to them from the outer world. It was too much to suppose that men so astonishingly advanced in exact knowledge would base their expectations on the mere traditional prophecy of Alexander before his death.

Kalliboas answered me without hesitation. "Our wise ones suppose," he said, "that this universe in which we live is composed of a finite number of elementary forms, which act and react upon one another perpetually. Therefore the number of possible regroupings and chains of events is limited. But the time in which they so react is infinite. Therefore every event which happens must have happened an infinite number of times before, and will be repeated an infinite number of times in the future—not only that exact event, but others approximating to it in all degrees of similarity.

"Thus the existence of our great founder upon this earth, being one of that limited number of possible events, is repeated after the comparatively short lapse of twenty-two centuries, which in the life-history of the universe is a mere moment. But there is a difference. Then he came to this valley a great conqueror despairing of the world and mankind. Now he has come to find his own lost people."

Poyning glanced at me. "Pretty odd," he muttered in English, "to meet old Nietzche's Eternal Recurrence so far from home as this!"

Kalliboas cocked his ear at the name. "That old philosopher of yours has indeed rediscovered old truths," he said. "But it is better to discover old truths than to repeat old lies."

"Your people, then," said Poyning, "were looking for the return of the king. Yet was it not strange they all should recognize him immediately they saw his face?"

Kalliboas rode in silence and led the way to another part of the courtyard, where we came in front of a grotto-like chamber. There was only one object here—a statue about half life-size, apparently in iron having the surface treated in some way to resist rust. The features were a marvelously exact image of Saunders Philipson, and that was startling enough; but what astonished me more was that the statue seemed to be supported on one wire little thicker than a knitting-needle.

"We have many images of our great founder," said Kalliboas, "with which all our people are perfectly acquainted, but we value none so much as this. It was made by his friend Deinokrates, the sculptor, one of that faithful band who followed him here."

"But—but how is it supported? One wire is not enough to hold its weight."

There was a fleeting light of amusement over the old man's austere face. "The wire is there to hold it down," he said. "It was an

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idle fancy of the sculptor's. The roof of this chamber is of great slabs of the stone that attracts iron, which was dug from the mountains westward. Do not go near if you have anything of iron about your persons."

Before leaving Kalliboas that day we walked with him along the eastern margin of the lake, and came to a tall circular tower in white marble, which was visible from a considerable distance away. We ascended this by an inner stairway and at last stood upon the roof, where we found a sentinel and one of the most ingenious devices imaginable. The platform was surrounded by a parapet about breast-high, topped by a continuation in some transparent pebble-like rock, while outside this was a similar parapet in the same material, the two arranged so as to act as a continuous telescope. How the difficulty of varying focus was overcome I couldn't understand, but the fact remains that in whatever direction we looked the surrounding valleys and foothills—even the upper slopes of the mountains themselves—seemed amazingly near to us.

The words of Kalliboas sounded behind us in a sort of grim caress. "See now, strangers," he said, "is it even as the student told when he cast his mind out over the valley?"

Poyning was staring southward. "There are men," he said in a queer voice. "What do they do?"

"They build a wall to protect the tomb. Since the great snow fell, new streams have burst out of the mountains in that quarter. Our engineers are busy with works to direct the water down to the lake by channels where it shall not injure the crops of our valley. Now it flows lawlessly, and though the tomb which you see is founded in solid rock, we have judged it wise to build the protecting wall."

Poyning remained staring through the crystal for some time, particularly towards the tomb and the direction from which we ourselves had entered the valley. I imagine we were both thinking that probably from this tower our first approach was signalled; and I know I was wondering how it came about, since a watcher was apparently posted here always, that the approach of the Tibetan, Sbrang Chikya, could have escaped detection.

We descended from the tower and followed Kalliboas to a point on the northeastern bank of the lake. The stream which entered here was of no great dimension, but even so, it flowed fast enough to have flooded the entire valley in a few weeks but for—as I imagine—the enormous degree of evaporation caused by the bone-dry climate, and the extensive irrigation works into which the water of the lake was deflected. Suddenly, with a heavy swirl, there arose in midstream a gigantic fish, which made straight for the bank where we stood. So startling was the creature's appearance and so swift its approach that I must confess for an instant I'd half an inclination to run, and I noticed Poyning took a quick step backwards from the water's edge. Then we realized our mistake. It was no fish at all, but a man, completely clad in a close-fitting diving costume; there were circles of transparent horn over the eyes, and gloved receptacles for the arms, but the legs went into one great sleeve stiffened to copy the tail of a fish; and we saw it was from this the diver got his power in swimming, an evolution he performed with singular ease and speed. How he was able to breathe and to sink at will we had no thought to examine then; our attention was very fully absorbed by a basket the man had been carrying in his hands under water and now laid on the bank.

He rolled out, divested himself of the fish-like skin—which he was able to do without assistance—and made a profound obeisance to Kalliboas.

"This fellow," said the latter, turning to us, "is to our children the most beloved man in the city. It is his duty to swim to the bed of the river and the lake and gather for them these pretty playthings."

Kalliboas stooped over the basket, took out a handful of pebbles, and handed them to me. They were curious pebbles, looking like scarred rough glass, but now and then out of the roughness came a fierce flash of light as the sun's rays caught an exposed facet. There was no room for doubt about these things. They were large diamonds.

Poyning took one of them, as if to examine it, and as he did so I felt him nudge me very gently.

"Would it not be easier," he said, "to get the stones by dragging the river for them?"

Then for the first and last time in our acquaintance Kalliboas chuckled. It was a grim chuckle, but the nearest approach to tenderness I ever knew him to show.

"The children value the stones more for having been obtained in this way," he said. "Often they come to see Old Fish diving for them."

He scooped up another large handful and gave them to me. "Take as many as you can carry," he said, the grim half-smile still on his features. "It may be that children in the city will ask you for them. It is true that in the world from which you have come men commit crimes to obtain these things, but you at least are above such temptation."

Was it a hint, a threat that we were never

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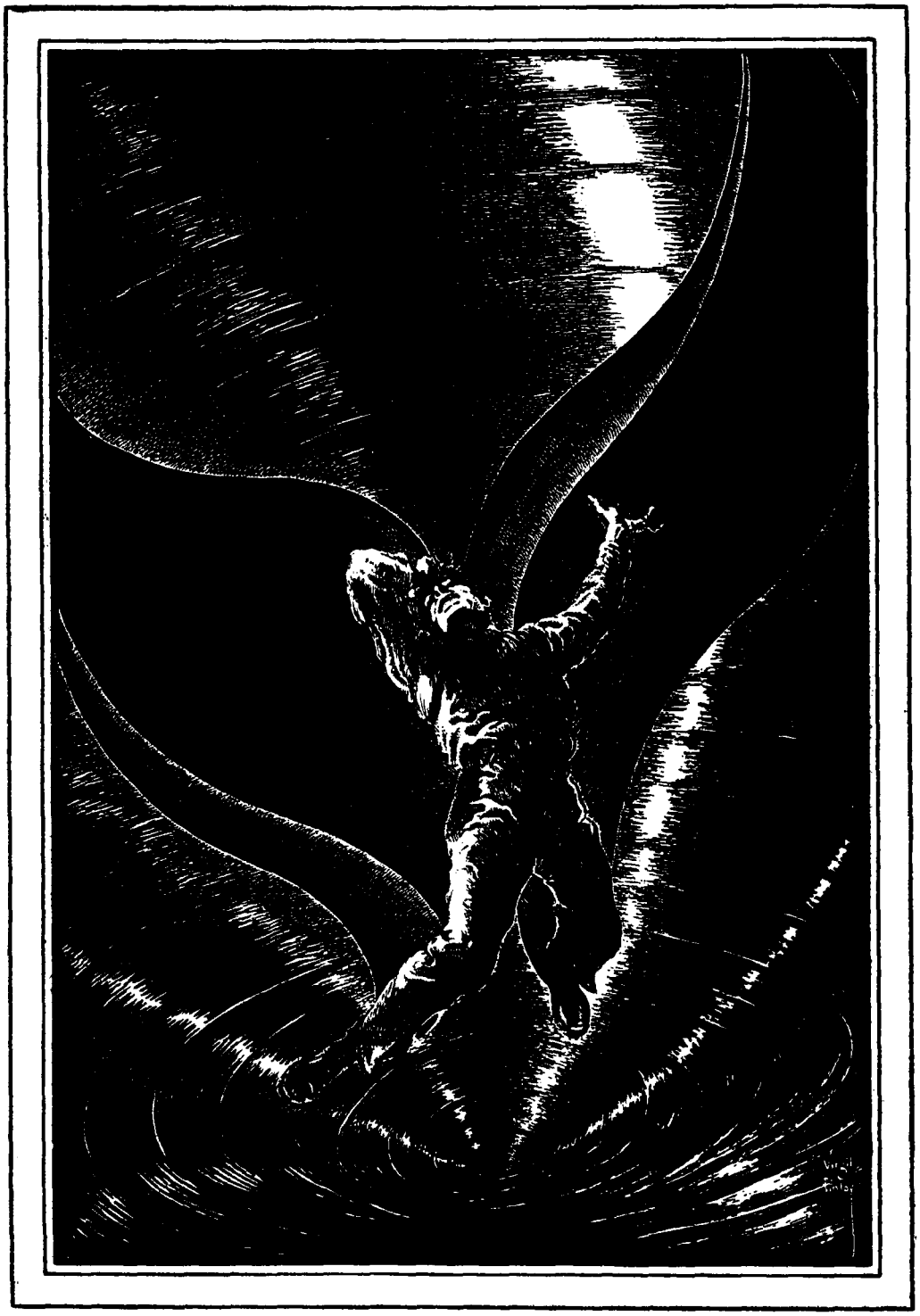

I was whelmed in the blackness of the Pit....

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again to see lands where men take the lives of their fellows for these bits of crystallized carbon?

STRANGELY enough, from that day onward our circumstances seemed to improve all round. If we had seen ourselves encircled in mystery, and detected vague menaces in what we had heard, now it became increasingly apparent that for some reason or other we were looked on more favorably by the people of the valley. That atmosphere of suspicion, which I had come to feel no less than Poyning, was melting away. In fact, we had taken a place among the first of the land. We had several audiences with the "king," as we found ourselves dropping into the way of calling Philipson, and though he said little to us of the inner politics of the city, we gathered he was steadily consolidating his position and winning over the disaffected party of Kalliphanes. He even told us one day that he thought he could now count on the unanimous support of the Nine Shadows, and considerably startled us by mentioning that Kalliboas was one of that sinister secret body. The names of the rest I never learned, though it is likely I saw and spoke to all before the end of my sojourn in Hellas.

Poyning and I had been learning to fly for some weeks now. Our great difficulty at first, I need hardly say, was to overcome our amazement at finding we actually *could* rise from the ground on wings, and even when we had got the better of this it was some time before we could bring ourselves to ascend to any height. There must have been always lurking at the back of our heads the notion that if we lost control, we should stand a better chance of escape by being at a low altitude. In point of fact, quite the reverse was really the case: greater experience would have told us, as the tutors did tell us, that a few hundred feet between us and earth would afford a breathing space in which to recover wing-purchase, whereas twenty feet would certainly not; but it must be remembered, the art was utterly strange to us, and that we started handicapped with all the pedestrian prejudices of the biped without feathers.

After a few days we gained confidence, and with this growing proficiency came to me at least a tremendous keenness for the sport. I wouldn't have missed my morning fly for all the rest of the day, for over and above its mere fascination it took us up into the bracing air of the higher levels, and by dint of the magnificent exercise it afforded, kept up in the very cream of condition and muscular strength.

One morning, when we were beginning to manage our wings with some pretensions to skill, we were flying together over the school at about three hundred feet from the plain, when Poyning suddenly headed off towards the city.

"Where are you going?" I shouted.

"Home," he yelled back. "I want to see what our house looks like from up here."

I'd never seen anybody fly directly over the city, and I had good reason to believe there was a law forbidding it. I called to Poyning to come back, and heard a faint cry from below, which also I imagine was a command to turn about, but Poyning was by this time drawn well ahead and apparently out of earshot. Cursing his foolhardiness I gave chase, moved, I've no doubt, by a sort of schoolboyish idea that if there was going to be a row it would be shabby to back down out of it; and very soon we were soaring over the very heart of the great sea of white buildings.

Now our troubles began. We were fairly well acquainted with the city as it appeared from the ground level; from above, there was a bewildering similarity about those marble roofs and courtyards. We wheeled round, until Poyning thought he had descried our house from the maze, and with a shout to me he began to descend, confidently enough. Then, suddenly, he checked his flight.

"This is the wrong place," he cried, and I saw him flap his wings in an effort to get up again.

But it was too late. He had no room to maneuver. His wing-tip struck the great eave of a building at the edge of the courtyard, and to my horror I saw his arms fly up and his body shoot straight down, dropping to the marble paving with a thud that turned me sick to hear.

I managed to alight without mishap, and a moment later was tearing off my wings and running to his assistance. Poyning lay on his side, in the tangled wreck of his gear.

"It's only my foot," he groaned, but as he said the word he rolled over and fainted.

In a few seconds I had his body clear of the mess and was examining him for injuries. Poyning came to himself almost at once, but when I touched his right ankle he winced and uttered a sharp cry.

"Better get a litter, Mirlees," he muttered between his clenched teeth. "There's a bone broken."

At this moment I heard a sound of light footsteps behind me, and looking round beheld a woman, who had apparently just emerged from the pillared doorway of the building. Poyning raised himself on one elbow, staring at her as at some enthralling vision, and I'm afraid I so far forgot my man-

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ners as to do likewise. The sudden apparition of such beauty as hers might have set any man off his balance. It completely robbed me of speech.

The woman's skin was white as the marble everywhere around us, her eyes more deeply purple than the skies out of which we had fallen, her features of a clean-chiselled magnificence that literally struck the breath from your lips as you beheld, while her hair, pure blue-black in hue, tumbled over her shoulders in cascades of sombre splendor. There was no mistaking the identity of that woman. She was the princess of the blood royal, to whom we had seen Saunders Philipson betrothed.

With a grace I cannot hope to describe she knelt beside Poyning, her features melting into a look of compassion that almost made me regret I wasn't the injured party myself.

"It is the little stranger," she murmured musically. "He has been bold enough to soar into the heavens like Ikaros of old, and like Ikaros he has fallen."

She rose suddenly to her feet, and clapped her hands, whereupon several attendants hurried out, manifestly scandalized, to the injured man. Then a physician appeared, to whom the princess turned with an air of haughty command.

"There is an injury to the little stranger's foot," she said. "You will bind it here, and as you value my favor you will give him no pain in the binding. You will then see him borne to his own house and tend him till he is recovered."

The physician lowered his forehead almost to the pavement and at once knelt on one side of Poyning, the princess kneeling on the other. While his foot was being put into a padded splint she laid her wonderful white hand on his brow. I saw her speak to the physician, then to Poyning, in a tone so low that I could only catch the tail end of what she said. She was looking into his eyes with an expression that seemed most curiously to combine tenderness with an astonishing intensity of will.

"Have no fear for your injury, little one," she said slowly. "Our most skillful healers will give you of their utmost skill, and within three days from now you will walk and fly again. These things will assuredly be as I have said. Farewell!"

Poyning's lips began to move, but I heard no sound come from them. Bewilderment and frank adoration struggled for the mastery of his face; and if there was any shadow of pain, I didn't see it. His broken foot he seemed to have forgotten. A moment later the princess had disappeared. Poyning was raised on a litter borne by eight attendants, and we moved off towards our own quarters.

KALLIBOAS, unusually stern and grim, was there almost as soon as we were. He had evidently heard of our flight over the city and our descent into the courtyard of the royal palaces—that was the place where we had blundered; yet beyond directing the physicians who were to treat Poyning, he said no word.

And now once more I witnessed an exhibition of the amazing surgery of these people of the valley. I can be perfectly sure of every word I write about it, for I saw the whole thing from no farther away, this time, than the side of the couch on which my companion had been laid. The broken bone had been set before he left the royal courtyard, and that ingenious padded splint was not removed now.

The physicians bathed the leg above and such surfaces of Poyning's ankle as were exposed, in warm water which I shrewdly suspected to be merely a more concentrated essence of the healing water we used in our baths. Then two of the curious wooden boxes were produced and laid one on either side of the damaged foot. The physician fixed into each a silver appliance shaped for all the world like a boat's rowlock—I imagine a specially fashioned "lead" was kept for various parts of the body—slid the horns of the rowlock over Poyning's leg just below the calf, and made some adjustment of the silent "battery." This was left in position for fully half an hour, then removed.

The physician gave Poyning a draught from a small vial, and began to speak to him. I heard the same words spoken over and over again, from which I knew hypnotism formed part of the treatment and that a suggestion was being made to the patient.

"You will now sleep," the level, monotonous voice said. "On awakening you will be already well towards recovery. The bone will be united and the pain and swelling vanished. In three days from now you will set your foot to the ground and you will find it strong as ever. These things cannot possibly happen otherwise, for thus it has been said and the speaking is true. You will now sleep. On awakening—"

This went on for two or three minutes, and I veritably declare I was almost asleep myself. I pulled myself up with an effort, and noticed that the physician had passed from assurances to question; he was, as it were, driving the suggestion home.

"What will you do now?" he demanded.

"I am going to sleep," came the drowsy voice of Poyning.

"And on awaking?"

"I shall be already well towards recovery."

"And after three days?"

"I shall set my foot to the ground. It will

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be strong as ever. In three days' time. . . ."

Poyning's words ran off into an incoherent mumble. Then silence. The physician turned to me.

"He will sleep for twenty-four hours," he said. "Try not to wake him before, and when he wakes, tell him nothing of what I have said to him now, for he will not remember. But in three days his other soul will remember for him, and he will walk again."

Poyning awoke in the following forenoon, remembering nothing of what had happened after he swallowed the draught. I stayed beside his couch most of that day, doing what I could to cheer him, but Poyning was curiously moody and depressed, and beyond remarking absently once or twice that Philipson's betrothed seemed to him to be an uncommonly pleasant lady and that it was a lucky disaster, after all, that had dropped him into the wrong courtyard—I didn't think it worth while to let him know the views of Kalliboas on this point—he said little.

The second day passed in the same way, without event or visitors.

I watched Poyning, the following day, for I was greatly curious to see whether that post-hypnotic suggestion the physician had left imprinted on his mind was going to work.

Very soon I saw something was stirring in Stephen Poyning. His manner became more and more excited, and at last, about eleven o'clock, he threw the sheet off his injured foot and felt it tentatively.

"It's sheer black magic and deviltry, of course," he muttered, "but—"

He was tugging at the fastenings of the splint. I next heard that ingenious contrivance clatter on the marble as he tossed it out of bed.

"I shan't want *that* any more. I can feel. Now let's see—"

He had set his foot to the floor and was very gingerly trying his weight upon it. The next moment he was standing. I hurried to him and gave him my arm.

"For God's sake be easy on it!" I cried. "If you break the bone again it'll take months to mend."

He threw off my arm impatiently. "Many thanks, Mirlees," he said, "but I don't think I require any. Isn't it amazing? The Princess Helene said I would walk again in three days, and—"

"How do you know her name is Helene?" I demanded.

Poyning gave me a queer look. "Eh? That is her name, anyhow," he said. "Didn't you know?"

"I didn't. And I'm hanged if I can fathom how you did. I've never heard her name mentioned."

He ran his fingers through his hair in a curiously abstracted manner. "That's odd," he muttered. "You must have forgotten. If Kalliboas hadn't mentioned the name to the pair of us I should hardly know it myself, should I? But I say, look at this, Mirlees!"

He was skipping round the floor, pausing now and then on one leg to flex and unflex the ankle which three days ago had been broken.

WE WERE so familiar with the city by this time that we often went out without Kalliboas or any other attendant, but up to the present, save on one occasion, it had always been by day. That one exception was a week or two before Poyning's accident. Where he went I don't know, but he told me next day—I was abed and asleep before he came back—that he had been out to see the valley by moonlight. Now, on the first night after his recovery, I noticed he had again left the house by himself. The same thing happened on the following night, and once or twice again afterwards. I began to get uneasy.

When, about the eighth night in succession he took himself off alone after dark, and I saw one of our attendants slip out behind him, I judged the affair had gone far enough. If there was any spying to be done, I would take a hand in it myself.

I slid noiselessly out into the courtyard and the street, which was fickly illuminated by a young horned moon. Poyning I couldn't see; but the attendant was just ahead of me, advancing furtively and taking advantage of the shadow of every building he passed. To move silently in the sandals worn in the valley was easy enough; moreover, there were still a few belated foot-passengers abroad—it was only about eleven o'clock, but the city folk were for the most part early bedgoers and early risers—and I don't think the watcher suspected he was being himself watched. After some while, however, the chase brought me to a quarter of the city entirely deserted.

At some way off rose a mass of a block of buildings, glistening white and majestic in the silvery light, but nearer to where I stood was a small pavilion with domed roof supported by fluted pillars. Out of the shadow of this structure suddenly emerged a figure, but I was now so near that I saw immediately by his height it wasn't our tall attendant. An instant later I had recognized the man as Stephan Poyning. Of the attendant I could see no vestige either in the courtyard inside the wall or the street without.

Then, from the far side of the court, appeared another figure—a woman's. She swept across the gleaming marble pavement with the

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grace of a goddess and the silence of a ghost, and soon I knew who she was, for with that superb face turned towards me, what light there was fell directly upon it. This was the woman who had come to Poyning's help on the day of his accident, whom he called the Princess Helene, Philipson's plighted queen.

Now followed the queerest part of the whole affair. To say I was embarrassed would be scarcely correct: it frightened me. With a little cry of joy the woman ran up to Poyning and folded him in her arms and kissed him passionately on the lips. Poyning reached up his arms, and placed them round her neck, and kissed her again; and there the pair remained, locked in one another's embrace, for fully a minute. I imagine that no scene in which that superb creature took part could appear undignified, or this would have appeared so, even ludicrous, for the crown of Poyning's head could hardly have reached higher than the level of her lips, and as she stooped to kiss him, he seemed literally lost in the loose shimmer of her white robe. I could hear nothing of what Poyning said, if he said anything, but from her came the repeated cry, accented in an ecstasy of tenderness:

"My little one! My little one!"

They withdrew into the shadow of the domed pavilion, and I heard their voices in low, earnest talk. I had seen enough—too much; I dropped noiselessly into the street and stood there under the wall, quivering with astonishment and alarm.

What utter folly, what unheard-of treachery, was this? Of the woman I knew nothing definitely beyond that she was betrothed to the new sovereign of the state. Yet from vague allusions dropped by Kalliboas—though Poyning was wrong in stating that Kalliboas had ever mentioned the woman's name in my hearing—I had gathered something regarding her status. There dwelt in the palaces, it seemed, several maidens of the ancient blood royal in its purest. By long tradition they were vowed to take no husband but the reigning prince, who chose from among their number on ascending the throne, and this, as we had seen, happened recently at the time of the abdication ceremony. The rest would now remain true to a vow of celibacy till a new prince succeeded. How the line was maintained, or what happened to these maidens with their advancing years I never discovered, though I suspect there was a mystery surrounding them more amazing than any other in all this amazing land, and that by some wizard tampering with what we regard as nature's laws they preserved their youth far beyond the span given to mortal women.

I was so staggered by what I had seen that I even forgot the need of concealment; and when, some minutes later, Poyning made his retreat by the way he had come, he almost fell on me. He recoiled in astonishment, and something he was carrying tinkled to the ground.

"Mirlees!" he gasped. "What are you after here?"

"I ought to ask you that," I retorted. "Good God, man, d'you want to ruin the pair of us?"

"I see," he almost sneered. "My coming here is likely to run you into danger too. Is that the reason you thought it worth while to spy on me?"

"Not altogether," I said, keeping my temper with difficulty. "You were followed from the house by one of our servants. I followed him, to see what he was up to. I thought it was him I'd tracked here. Not until I got to the top of that wall did I see it was you. And I'd give a good deal *not* to have seen what I've seen tonight."

"Really? I don't understand how it concerns you."

"Good God!" I cried hotly. "I should have thought Philipson was worth a little better treatment than that. He's kept pretty much on the square with us—"

"Philipson? What's he to do with it?"

"*What!* If a man I'd thought my friend fooled around with *my* wife—"

"Wife? You're mistaken, Mirlees. The lady I've just left is not Philipson's wife."

"Huh! Affianced wife, then. . . ."

"She is not even that."

"D'you mean to tell me we didn't see him betrothed to her?"

"We certainly did not. Helene is a twin sister of the princess. The resemblance is exact enough, I'll admit."

This might have been true or not, but it was certainly new to me. "Why didn't you tell me before?" I said.

"You hardly gave me a chance," replied Poyning coldly. "You seemed so ready to believe me a cad."

"I'm sorry for that," I said. "But you knew what that woman is. Have you considered what's likely to happen to both of us—and perhaps to Philipson too—if you're caught in a business like tonight's?"

"I know a good deal more of her than you do, Mirlees," he said quietly. "I know that I love her more than my own body and soul, and that if loving her means death to me I shall meet it—with open arms."

I was silent for some moments. There was a ring in Poyning's words that I knew, that told me beyond any shade of doubt that he was fallen into the state which knows no prudence nor does it listen to logic.

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"But remember," he continued, "it's my risk, not yours. If I come to grief over this, I fail to see why you should be any worse off unless you're caught in it with me. Now let me go. I'm going to run into fresh danger."

"Where are you going?"

"Listen, Mirlees. We all three had an object when we came on this adventure. Philipson's was a lost kingdom, yours a great discovery, mine—my own quest. I'm going on it tonight."

"What is it?"

"I'm going to the tomb on the southern foothills. Don't ask me why, for I can't tell you, and don't try to come with me. If there's danger attaching to it, I'll face it alone."

I STOOD still, considering the position. Stephen Poyning, aged about twenty-one, well favored in mind and body with all the world before him, was saying yes to a perilous adventure. Myself, thirty-six, a widower, with something at least of my life-work behind me and no very great prospects of happiness in front, was declining the gambit. Had it been daylight I've no doubt he would have seen me redden a little.

"I don't know that it's altogether outside the scope of *my* quest," I said.

He paused, undecided. "What do you mean?" he queried.

"This. I don't attach as much importance to that grave as you seem to, Poyning, but the identity of the stranger who lies in it is still a riddle I'd be sorry to leave the valley without solving. I therefore suggest that if anybody's to go to the tomb at all, we might as well both go."

For all his valiant flourishes I caught a note of relief in Poyning's answer. "You're a good fellow, Mirlees," he said, "and I've talked like a yahoo tonight. But why should you risk your life too—for I'm convinced it may easily amount to that—"

I picked up the lanthorn—it was a lanthorn—that he had dropped. "Let's get away," I said, "or it will be daylight before we're out of the city."

"Very well," he assented, "though frankly I'd rather you didn't." He was groping on the pavement at his feet. "Wait a minute, or I shall be no better off than I was last time."

"You've been there before?"

"Some weeks ago. But the place was very effectively locked. Now—ah, here it is." He picked up a long silvery-looking strip of metal and quickly slipped it into the bosom of his robe.

"How far is the tomb?"

"Five good miles, not counting climbing. It took me four hours before, but then I lost time finding the way."

We set off at once through the silent streets of the city, stealing from shadow to shadow and pausing every now and then to assure ourselves that the attendant, who had so mysteriously disappeared, was not following us now. If he was, I never from first to last detected the least trace of him. We made fair time, considering the need of caution, and were soon come to the standing crops southward of the city, then on to the grassy foothills. For all the signs of life we saw, we might have been in the middle of a desert.

Poyning's recollection of the ground stood him in good stead. He had learned on his former sally that the best way to find the tomb was to strike for the new stream that had recently burst out of the mountains and follow it up. This water, though much shrunken from what it had been when we saw it from the watchtower, still showed well in the moonlight, and sounded distinctly on the still night air, and we found it without much difficulty. The going was bad, however; over and above the earthworks which the engineers had thrown up, the hillside itself was rough and strangely soggy for ground at such a slant, and it must have been fully two hours before we sighted the tomb. It rose from behind a low hump on the hillside, a small but beautifully designed building, with pillars and steps in the eternal marble; except that the entrance in the middle of the façade was a good deal larger in proportion, the structure might have passed for a model of our own house. Poyning discovered the aperture for the key, thrust in the long silver bar, tried it one way and another, and I heard the gentle screech of metal against metal. We leaned our shoulders against the dark teak-like wood. It gave. The tomb was open before us.

"Wait," I said, catching his arm. "There's no need to scatter clues abroad."

With that I carefully confused our tracks round the door, loosened my sandals, and stepped out of them barefoot on to the lowest marble stair, motioning Poyning to do the same. Then we entered.

The mausoleum was in pitchy darkness, for there was no aperture but the door, and that we shut as soon as we had passed inside. I heard Poyning's heart pounding, and saw his hand shake like a man in an ague as he struck a light with his flint—the people of the valley used a very ingenious implement of this type to kindle fire—and lit the lamp. He held it up, and together we swept our gaze around the interior of the tomb.

There was little to see. The floor, walls and ceiling were plain polished marble, while the

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nave was almost filled by a bier, of the same material but beautifully carved with groups representing, as it seemed to me, ancient myths of the nether world. Upon this rested a sarcophagus, in shape surprisingly reminiscent of an Egyptian mummy-case, and fashioned of an opaque plaster so cunningly finished that at the first glance you would have said that it too was solid marble.

Poyning stared at this for fully a minute, his features drawn into an expression I had never seen on them before. He then raised the lamp to the blank walls, and we scanned them closely all over, but it was Poyning who spotted the inscription. I had to look twice before I could locate it at all—the carving was so fine and small. It was a short legend, but it seemed to me to compress into ten words a whole world of grimness.

"A stranger strayed into the valley and died. Disturb him not."

That was all: no date appeared, no name, no clue of any sort to the old tragedy.

POYNING continued to examine the interior of the tomb inch by inch. Suddenly I saw him drop to one knee.

"Come round to this side," he said, in a high, cracked voice.

He was pointing to something on the marble floor. There was no mistaking that mark. It was the print of a bare foot, larger than Poyning's but not so large as mine.

"It isn't fresh," said Poyning. "Nor is it very old. Somebody else has been here recently, somebody who also preferred to leave no trace of his visit. Only he wasn't quite careful enough. What did he come for?"

"God knows."

"I think I do, too. It seems pretty evident."

"What do you mean?"

Poyning rose and tapped the sarcophagus. "This was not here when we came into the valley," he said. "It's been made since. Why? Hide the lamp, Mirlees. I'm going out."

I screened the light under my robe, while Poyning opened the door and left the chamber. When he returned he was carrying a heavy snag of stone.

"This appears to be the only way now," he muttered, and to my dismay began to tap the plaster casing, first gently, then harder. The white material cracked right across. Poyning laid down the stone and tugged at the broken plaster with his hands. A big, cup-shaped shard came away. He bent over the exposed face, and staggered back with a hoarse scream. It is scarce to be wondered at that Poyning did this.

There was an inner casing of some crystal-like material, also moulded to mummy-case shape, and through this we could see distinctly—even too distinctly—the head of the dead man. The body had evidently been embalmed with skill, for the face was preserved as if life had only just gone out of it. That rather added to the ghastliness. I have said I do not wonder that Poyning screamed. I could have screamed aloud myself, for on those dead features was imprinted the most intense despairing horror I have ever seen: it was the countenance of a damned soul being dragged down into hell.

At the moment of death, I imagine, those eyes had been wide and staring, for it had been necessary to sew the lids together to close them. But most frightful of all, to both of us, was the identity of that face. In spite of all its horrible distortion, it was quite unmistakably the face of an older Stephen Poyning.

He stared transfixed at the apparition for a moment, stooped and kissed the crystal casing above the forehead, and rushed out of the tomb.

I replaced the broken plaster, cleared away as best I could the evidences of our invasion, and followed him, going back to lock the door when I had got the key from Poyning. Not a word did he utter as we hurried sliding and stumbling down the hill. When I told him to wash the mud from his sandals in the rushing stream he did so mechanically, in silence, and strode on, his face set in a granite mask that concealed anguish and horror alike.

I judged well to approach our house with extreme caution. The breaking of the plaster envelope to the sarcophagus might remain undiscovered for years, but it also might come to light tomorrow, in which case our having been abroad would naturally draw the first suspicion upon ourselves. Poyning, however, seemed to have thrown prudence behind him. He stalked up the steps as if the hour had been noon, flung open the doors and entered.

None of the attendants appeared to be about, or even awake, and I had certainly seen nobody outside the house. It looked as if we had been lucky enough to elude observation from start to finish of the gruesome adventure.

Poyning was in the very act of striking his flint when I snatched it out of his hand. "It's late, you know, old man," I said. "Better go to bed in the dark tonight."

Even as I said this I had a most strange and uncanny sense that we were being looked at. I peered all round the dark central hall of the house, but could see nothing; at last, however, against the slender white pillars that marked the entrance to our inner chambers and were faintly discernible even in the gloom,

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my eyes came to rest on something a shade whiter. There was at the same moment a sharp sound like the hiss of a snake. Then I'm afraid my nerves, already strung taut by what we had seen that night, got the better of me.

"Who's there?" I cried, in a voice I wouldn't have known for my own.

There came no answer. I struck the flint I had taken from Poyning, and kindled the big hanging lamp over my head.

The flame flickered, then rose steadily, and as the chamber grew brighter a tall form stood out clear between the pillars of the party wall. It was Kalliboas, his great frame quivering, his stern features livid with fury.

CHAPTER VII

ESCAPE?

FOR one instant I had thought of trying to carry it off on an assumption of innocence, but Kalliboas very soon convinced me of the futility of that.

"So," he hissed, his long arm thrown out towards us, "it is thus you require our hospitality, men of the outer world! Thus do you flout the will of our rulers, thinking that by a childish deceit your impious deed shall remain hidden! Blind fools, because you have chosen a time after darkness fell, do you fondly imagine you have not been seen by our eyes from your going to your coming back? Have you not learned that we of the valley see far, needing no light of sun or moon to see by? Have you not understood that the commands of the Nine, who graved upon the stranger's tomb their behest that his body remain inviolate, are commands to be disobeyed only on pain of death—and worse than death? You have understood, strangers, yet you have disobeyed!"

The wrath of the old man was so terrible to behold and feel; his words came out in such a scorching torrent, that I literally bowed my head, as if under a sudden tempest. I had no answer to make, no plea, and would have had none even if I hadn't been scared out of my wits by the old man's threats—which I am not ashamed to confess I was. If anything had been lacking to tell me our number was up, the fact that Kalliboas had, for the first time in my knowledge of him, named the Nine Shadows specifically, would have done so: no longer was there need to hide from us the hand of that dread body. We shouldn't live to spread the knowledge.

But if I was cowed, Poyning seemed not in the least disposed to be. He rushed up to the old man, his fists clenched, his face pale as death, and for a moment I thought he was going to hurl himself upon him; but he checked, and poured out a torrent of words no whit less furious than those we just heard. It was the cry of a creature at bay, seeing death ahead but very fully determined to make a fight for it.

"Hospitality!" he cried, swinging around and pointing towards the south. "In ancient times it was a sacred duty to your people: *there* is how you practice it today! Truly, you have improved upon the old custom of your race! A stranger came into the valley, as it has been written, seeking rest from the weariness of his travel. You gave him rest—the rest from which there is no awakening. But it happens that after many years the stranger's son has come into this valley, seeking him. To the stranger's son you lie, without seeming to lie. No man, say you, was near the stranger when he died—truly said, for you of your great wisdom can slay without poison or steel. But it may be that the son shall see the body of his father and learn the manner of his death—therefore you hide your crime. Indeed you are a righteous people, that the discovery of murder is repellent to you! Justly you shun contact with the outer world and its misdeeds—"

"Silence!" thundered Kalliboas. "Silence, or it were better for you never to have been born! Here shall you remain, not setting foot over the threshold, while it is decided what shall become of you. Strive not to flee—as well strive to escape from the bowels of yonder mountains! You have defied the Nine, and the Nine shall settle your fate!"

With that he was gone, leaving on my mind, at least, a very distinct impression that the end would not be long coming. Poyning threw himself on to a couch, where he sat a long while in silence, his head buried in his hands. When he looked up, all the fury of passion was gone out of his face, and a deep-lined sorrow had taken its place.

"It's my doing, Mirlees!" he groaned. "I have dragged you into this. Forgive me!"

"There's nothing for me to forgive you about," I said. "I came into the business with my eyes wide open. Had I known as much as I do now, I should have joined you more readily still."

"It's decent of you to say that," he replied, "even if it isn't all true. But there's a good deal you don't know. Nor could I tell you before, for it was a matter I talked about to nobody—it concerned my father's honor."

"That *is* a point I'm still in the dark upon," I observed.

Poyning sat twisting and untwisting his hands. "It's an old story," he said at last, "and

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till now it has been a mysterious one even to me. You remember, back in China—my God, it seems ages ago!—I told you and Philipson I'd an ambition to explore these wildernesses. Neither of you pressed me for my exact motive, and I should not have told you if you had. But I had a very particular reason indeed."

He paused, with a twitching of the lips, but after a while seemed to regain his grip, and continued in a steady voice.

"My father was an officer in the Indian Army, a good soldier, I believe, but never popular in his regiment. Men were inclined to look askance at him because of his strange, moody, mystic temperament. These traits became more pronounced in him after my mother's death, which occurred when I was born. He had always been deeply interested in oriental religions, and knew more of such matters than it is usually thought good for a European to know. There were even whispers—no doubt the sort of silly gossip which will gather round a man of his type—that he dabbled in Eastern sorceries and devil-worship. All this tended more and more to make him a lonely man. Then came his mysterious disappearance. He was stationed on the frontier at the time, and had obtained six months' leave to go up country—as he gave out, to investigate certain obscure native traditions with a view to writing an account of them.

"My father crossed the frontier from Kashmir, having no other European with him, and from that point all trace of him was lost. Time went on, his leave expired, but my father never returned to his regiment. In the case of any other man his disappearance might have been explained by some climbing accident or encounter with wild beasts, but my father's reputation being what it was, stories began to be whispered about him. His name fell under a cloud. It was commonly believed that he still lived, and had buried himself among a native tribe in the wilderness where they practiced the devilish cults in which he was known to have been interested.

"I was at school in England, and could do little towards clearing my father's name. Only on rare occasions when officers who had known him were on leave could I make any enquiries at all, but one man, a Major Fetherston, with whom my father had been more intimate than with anybody else in India, showed me a letter he had received from him just before his departure for the interior. This gave me a new clue. My father's last letter to me had mentioned that he was going up country to investigate native traditions, but in this letter to Major Fetherston he actually specified the tradition.

In former trips over the border, he said, he had come across a curious story, to the effect that somewhere far eastward of the mountains lay a large valley inhabited by ghosts, who lived in the temples of white stone and possessed the power of transforming themselves into great birds. The tradition seemed so strange and unusual, wrote my father, that he was going to try and get more information about it. Major Fetherston gave me that letter. His manner was very kind, but it was clear enough to me that he shared the common view that Major Poyning had committed what, in the case of a private soldier, would be called desertion.

THE years passed. Never another hint of my father's fate reached me, but I resolved that when I grew up I would find out the truth about him, and that until his name was cleared, I would mention my father to nobody. Then, how to get to the East? Most of my small patrimony had been swallowed up in my education. Also, even if I could get to India it would be difficult to prosecute the search there without giving out that I was the son of a man disgraced. At last, however, I got into touch with an old scholar who was going to China to collect materials for a book on Eastern history. This seemed my chance. I had read over and over again my father's letter to Major Fetherston, with the help of maps, and it seemed to me, since this valley of ghosts was supposed to be far *east* of the mountains, that my father must have penetrated into Tibet, and that country could be approached quite as well from the China side as from India. So I closed with the old historian. I was to serve him as secretary for a year, by the end of which time I had no doubt I should have found something to support me until the opportunity came to go inland and follow my quest at closer quarters.

"We sailed together to Shanghai, but there, on the day after landing, he died very suddenly, leaving me on the rocks. How I hawked my learning in vain round the Treaty Ports you already know. The night I met Saunders Philipson I was at the end of my tether and desperate; I had expended my last dollars on a bend with two officers off a river steamer, fully intending to go to the British Consul next morning and present myself as a beachcomber in want of a passage home. Philipson's commission in Shanghai I naturally jumped at, and then, when I heard that he was going up country to investigate a legend apparently identical with what I had been brooding over for years, believe me, Mirlees, I very nearly collapsed. I fancy that one fact has done more to establish my faith in a Providence

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than all the chapels I ever attended at school and the 'Varsity.'"

He stopped with an air so grave you would never have believed this was the same casual young exquisite we had picked up at Nanking. If the adventure had done nothing more for Stephen Poyning, it had deepened his draught considerably.

"Then," he resumed at length, "when we reached this place and found there *had* been a previous explorer, and a European at that, I felt I was near the end of my quest. I see now quite clearly that Kalliboas recognized me almost at once from my likeness to my father. It was no more than a vague suspicion at first, of course, but once I realized that he was deliberately putting obstacles in the way of our visiting the stranger's tomb, my suspicions began to take shape. Since then I have worked with one end: to unravel that secret. My first attempt was a failure, as I told you tonight. No doubt Kalliboas was aware of it, and no doubt the cold-blodded old fiend laughed to himself to think the locked door and plaster casing would always prevent me from learning the truth. But he had reckoned without my ally."

"You mean—"

"The Princess Helene. God knows what I've done to earn it, Mirlees, but Helene loves me a good deal more than she respects Kalliboas."

"But how did you come to see her? I take it that *is* where you've been prowling these nights?"

Poyning looked uncomfortable. "It's a queer thing for any sane man to tell," he said, "a very queer thing, but this is my version of it. On the second night after my accident, Helene came to me in a dream so vivid—well, it seemed too vivid to be merely that. She stood beside my bed and spoke to me, telling me again very positively that in another day I should walk. When she went away, I seemed to follow her, and hear her speak of herself as the Princess Helene. Then the vision, or whatever it was, faded away, and when I woke in the morning, I was well enough convinced it was no more than a common dream. But then, by the accident of talking to you, I discovered I knew her name and you did not. That set me thinking. Could there be, I wondered, more in it than I had supposed? I determined to put it to the test. The road I went with her in the dream had remained quite clear in my mind, and I followed it to the point where the vision faded. I was amazed to find everything fit in exactly, and Helene waiting for me. It was then that I learned her name was indeed Helene, and that she was twin sister of Euphrosune.

"We met at the same place on the following night, and every night since, and she has told me many things known to hardly a soul in this valley but the Nine Shadows. My inquiries naturally enough were mainly for the stranger who had come here before. Helene had seen him, and remembered him. He was a man, she said, very like me in face, though much older. He came into the valley alone, nearly dead with exhaustion, and was tended and hospitably entertained: none of the secrets of the valley, however, were explained to him. He knew nothing of the Hall of Wandering Souls, or that languages of the outer world are understood there—which is a fact, Mirlees, incredible as it may seem—and as he could not speak the language of the valley, communication with him was conducted mostly by signs. After a time the stranger wanted to go back by the way he had come, but he was made to understand that he must remain. He persisted, however; left his house one night after dark and struck out for the mountains southward. His body was discovered on the foothills next day."

"How did he die?"

"Helene says that was never known. According to her view, no action had been decreed by the Shadows, but one of them took the law into his own hands and—*went into action.*"

"Then—then it *can* be done?"

"I solemnly believe, Mirlees—though I would never expect any man who had not been here to believe it—that to prevent my father from escaping from this valley and betraying its secret to the world, he was murdered, by some tremendous concentration of will power acting over a distance. It may even be, by the way, that the Tibetan Sbrang Chikya was similarly made away with, though I have gathered no information about him. The killing of my father gave rise, apparently to considerable dissatisfaction, and the Nine decided to make amends—as if amends could be made for a cold-blooded murder!—by burying the stranger in state. Who the murderer was, too, I cannot find out from Helene. But I have my own suspicion."

"Who?"

"Kalliboas."

If this was so it would explain much. Admitting the amazing manner of the murder as a fact, if Kalliboas had indeed committed it he might well wish to hide the crime from the son of the murdered man, particularly as his action had been repudiated by the dread Nine. He might even have prevailed upon the rest to sanction shrouding the body in that opaque plaster case, taking advantage of the dangerous state of the hillside as a pretext

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for delaying our visit to the tomb until the work was complete.

"WELL," I said at last, "we've thrown down the gauntlet to Kalliboas now. What do you propose to do?"

"Nothing," said Poyning. "At least for the present. I've ruined you, Mirlees, and if I'm not careful I shall ruin Philipson too—without bettering my own prospects one scrap. What he told us of his position here is more than confirmed by what I have learned from Helene. Our coming to the city has given rise to dissension and intrigues which had never been known in its history before.

"The Kalliphanes faction, who deny Philipson's claim to the throne, are desperately afraid our discovery of the valley will eventually lead to its being invaded by the outer world at large, and they will stick at nothing to prevent this. They are using the fear of it as a lever to win over the Nine, urging that if Philipson were the true Alexander he would not have brought danger—meaning us two—into the state with him. It is no pretended fear of theirs, either, nor confined to their faction. It was strong enough, as I believe, to cause Kalliboas to murder my father on the mere suspicion that he was trying to escape from the valley."

"Pretty ghastly outlook for us if *we* try to escape," I said.

Poyning was staring straight ahead of him as if into the far future. "For me there will be no escape from this valley, Mirlees," he said. "I shall not attempt it."

"D'you mean you'll be content to stay here always?"

"Here, or anywhere else Helene may be. I never loved a woman before, but I love one now. I love her more than my life, more than my honor. I shall never go back to the world to clear my father's name now. Even if it were possible for me to get out of the valley alive—which I don't think it is—I would not go. I shall stay here and see the business through. They may kill me for resisting the Nine, but till they do I shall demand and continue to demand that my father's murderer be punished. They may kill me on the score of Helene. She is looked upon by these people as little short of divine. God knows what is to happen to the stray foreigner who has dared to love her. And you, Mirlees, what will you think of me? If you try to escape you will be left to do it alone."

"It won't be the first time in my life I've been in that situation," I said. "As for you, and Philipson too, for that matter, it seems to me circumstances have been too strong for the both of you. Philipson may have known more than he chose to tell me, but he can hardly have guessed that if he brought me into this valley I should be unable to get out. And you weren't to know you would meet your fate here."

Poyning's face brightened immeasurably. "Then you don't think the worse of me for it?" he cried.

"There's one thing about me you seem to forget, Poyning," I said, "—if you ever knew it. I loved a woman myself once. That was my wife. When she died, ten years ago, I prayed for death also. I've often prayed for it since, and if there hadn't been my work still to live for, I think I should have helped myself to an answer to the prayer before now. But there was my work—the digging out of obscure facts about the East—and that's what led me here.

"Just at present the chances seem to be against my getting back to the outer world and publishing an account of this valley, but if ever I'm able to do that, never fear but I shall let it be known the late Major Poyning met his death trying to return to his regiment like a good soldier. If I meet my own death here, it may bring me nearer to the only woman I ever loved. So there appear to be compensations either way."

He took my hand in silence, and wrung it warmly.

"Come," I said at length, "if there are only a few days left to us we shan't materially extend them by staying awake all night."

With that I turned in and slept—not well, it is true, but soundly enough to hear nothing of what happened during the night. That something had happened was very plain. Poyning had vanished. His bedchamber was empty and bare, and not a word could I extract from the one solemn attendant left to me—the rest were gone—as to what had become of him. Moreover, looking out through the tracery windows of the house, I observed several stalwart figures disposed about it. At first I couldn't understand what these men were doing, but it soon broke upon me. They were my guards. I was a prisoner, in solitary confinement.

I must confess that Poyning's disappearance affected me with a peculiar sense of horror. There, all day, I sat still or strode up and down in that lonely twilit house, sinking steadily lower in spirits, until by real twilight of the outer day I was in such a terrible depression as I had never known before. I couldn't account for it. My situation was perilous enough in all conscience; I might be led out to execution at any moment; but I had often faced death before—I had faced it many times on this adventure—with a light

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heart. Now abject terror, quaking cowardice —all the torturing emotions with which a craven spirit views danger—seemed to be rushing over me in waves.

Then, with a sudden thrill of horror that well nigh made me scream aloud, I realized the truth. Somewhere, I knew not where, the dark powers possessed by these people were being set in motion against me. I cannot hope to adequately portray my feelings—there are no words in our language equal to that terrible anguish of mind. At times I seemed to be undergoing agonies of alarm like those I had felt on the first occasion I was hypnotized in the Hall of Wandering Souls: the blackness of darkness that surrounded and penetrated my brain, and a ghastly *physical* impression of falling miles through space; but what I had experienced then was mere play to what I felt now.

I could not have believed it possible for human personality to plumb such abysses of anguish, for the sensations I underwent were deeper, intenser by far than anything I had ever dreamed; and beyond that, there was a terrifying distinctiveness about this awful obsession. It was a feeling of fear, yet it was not fear; it was like an epitome of all the stabbing sorrows of a lifetime, yet it was more than any human sorrow; and over all, that frightful sense of mental strangulation, as though it were my *soul* that was writhing in the grip of some soul far mightier, which must soon crush it to nothingness and death.

WHAT I did during this time I do not know, but afterwards, from the fact that both my legs were black and blue, I concluded that I must have been from time to time beaten to my knees by the anguish of horror that surged over me, and that time after time I struggled again to my feet. Suddenly, after how long I cannot determine, the clouds lifted; my brain became clear and untroubled, and to my amazement I found myself in an excellent cheerfulness. The house was now quite dark, but the darkness did not distress me, nor had any shadow of fear remained on my mind. To my even greater astonishment I noticed I was healthily tired; and without more ado I went to my bedchamber, threw myself on to my couch, and slept a sound untroubled sleep till broad daylight. On awaking I was still in such buoyant spirits that I almost fancied the experience of yesterday must have been some elaborate delusion: that my sudden imprisonment and Poyning's uncanny disappearance had so preyed upon my mind that I had unconsciously magnified a mere ordinary fit of the blues into those horrors I have so feebly described.

As the day advanced, this impression deepened: I felt comparatively happy.

Then, towards twilight, began again that terrible obsession. It came more swiftly, this time, was more intense, and, I believe, lasted longer.

When I came to myself I was lying on a couch, and I noticed immediately that not only my robe but the lawn covering of the couch itself was wringing wet—drenched with the cold sweat of terror. The first thing I did on rising was to take off my sandal and with the buckle pin score two deep scratches on the marble wall of the chamber. I did this under a curious impulse to keep tally of the days of my captivity, and it is that record alone which enables me to say how long I was imprisoned; afterwards morning and evening became blurred in my memory in a sort of incoherent jumble of horror.

It was, by the scorings on the wall, the sixth night of my captivity. That day I had been prey to the longest and severest attack of mental anguish yet, but at what I take to have been about nine in the evening, this had suddenly lifted, leaving me in a buoyancy of spirit likewise more pronounced than I had known from the beginning. I had retired to bed, and lay for a long time wondering whether this abrupt lightening of the gloom meant that I was to be tortured no further, when a female figure noiselessly entered my room. The bedchamber, I may say, was at the side of the house, and was illuminated during daytime by a window of open marble tracery built into the wall, through which the beams of the moon, now nearing the full, eerily filtered. The woman glided towards me, and stood so close that I had no difficulty in recognizing her as the maiden of Poyning's adventure on the last night we spent together.

"Princess Helene!" I gasped.

Her wonderful features broke into a smile. "You have mistaken me, stranger," she whispered. "I am Euphrosune, wife of the prince. Hearken! You have been in great danger, and you are in great danger still. You cannot fail to know that attempts have been made to kill you?"

"Only too well," I said. "Tell me, was it Kalliboas?"

"We will speak no ill of Kalliboas," she replied solemnly. "Kalliboas is dead. Seek not the manner of his death, for these are terrible matters and not good to be spoken of."

"And Poyning?"

"The little one lives. My sister loves the little one, and no harm will befall him so long as we three, the prince and my sister and I, live to shield him. But there are grave perils that beset us all. Your coming to the city from

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the great world without has set our rulers one against the other: we are in the cross-currents of a stormy sea. It is well that you should leave us, stranger."

A tremendous new hope rose in me.

"You will help me to escape?" I cried in a hoarse whisper.

"There is one thing that can enable us to do that," she said. "My husband has told me that among the race from whom you come, oaths are sacred. If we contrive your escape, will you swear never by word or deed, now or henceforth, to betray the existence of our country to any man of the outer world?"

The words fell on my ears like a physical blow. My new-born hope was dashed rudely to the ground. In a flash I saw all my ambition fail: all the perils and hardships I had undergone in coming to this amazing land were undergone in vain if I were debarred from making it known to the world; never should I reap the rewards and fame of a discovery beside which whatever of discoveries I had made before—I, who had given my life to the making of discoveries in little-known lands—would seem humdrum and small; never should I see my name on the title page of the greatest book of exploration ever printed. I think she must have also learned from the prince what my life-work in the outer world had been, and that she was aware of the struggle going on within me.

"Listen, stranger," she said, speaking with an intensity of earnestness and persuasion. "From that far-off day when our prince, in the life that was before, bade us keep our land secret from the world, never have we risked contamination with the outer peoples. Terribly do our people not less than our rulers fear that pollution. It must not be!"

"And if I swear the oath?"

"The prince will contrive your flight. When you have gone, there will be great tumult in this valley—it may even be that the prince's own life will be in danger. But he will quell that uprising. He will make known to our rulers and if need be to our people that the secret of this valley is safe with you forever—he will pledge his own sacred word."

"And if I refuse to swear?"

"Can the prince set at naught the command which he, in his former coming, gave us? Can he imperil the existence of his own people? Without an oath of secrecy, by all you hold most sacred, the prince will not, cannot, countenance your return to the world without. And should you try to escape by your own devices, even though we will it, we may be powerless to save you from swift destruction."

I remained gripping the coverlet of my couch as if it were my great chance slipping away from me. "So be it," I groaned at last. "I swear by all I hold most sacred, never by word or deed, now or henceforth, to betray the existence of this country to any man of the outer world."

"It is bravely said. At this time tomorrow, then, be ready to step out of this house and leave the valley forever. And now, stranger, farewell. Only once again will you see me in this life, and then it may be that you shall not know it is I."

She made a queenly gesture, and I, stirred by a sudden impulse of gratitude, had risen from my couch and stretched out my hand to take hers and raise it to my lips. You who have read thus far will now understand what I mean when I say I have set down this incident not in confidence that it will be believed.

My hand passed through hers, and through her body, and I stumbled heavily against the marble wall of the room.

AS I HAVE already written, I offer no explanation of the incident with which my last chapter closes, but whatever it was, it caused me to do something I had certainly never done before over a mental shock. I must have fainted. When I recovered consciousness I was lying on the marble floor of my bedchamber chilly and stiff, and with a very palpable throbbing of my forehead, where, on examination, I discovered a big bruise. So much for the outside of my head. Within, my brain was also throbbing, partly with bewilderment, but a good deal more with exultation. I might be the sport of an hallucination, but I flatly refused to believe it had no foundation in fact. If I didn't know, I *felt* that help was coming.

I rose silently to my feet and stole across to the tracery-window. From that spy-hole I could see two of the watchers standing at some distance away, motionless but clearly awake, alert but seeming to have no suspicion that anything out of the common had happened inside the house. They could have heard neither my talk nor the thud I must have made when I fell. I then crept back to my couch, and went carefully over the events of the night. I wanted to fix them on my brain, for I had a very pronounced impression they were going to be of use to me. I determined, too, that tomorrow I would get ready to escape exactly as if the chance were really on its way.

The day passed without much in the way of incident, but it was one of the most exciting I ever spent, and long before nightfall I was in a downright fever. I watched myself minutely for any recurrence of the great depression, but there was no hint of it; my brain

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remained clear, my spirits buoyant, and had it not been for the very noticeable discoloration of my bruised knees, I should have found it difficult to believe I'd been through the unspeakable tortures of the past week.

There was one fact that struck me at once as unusual—even significant. My attendant, or jailer as he was *now* become, had been accustomed to occupy one of the servants' chambers at the back of the house; here he took his meals and slept, entering the living rooms only to bring me my food. Today the fellow posted himself on a couch in the main hall and remained there practically all the time. I pretended to take no notice of his presence, but I couldn't fail to see the meaning of it; and the thought raised my hopes still higher. It looked as if there *was* a plot on foot to further my escape, and my enemies, having got wind of it, had ordered this fellow to remain where he would be in a better position to raise an alarm.

The man said not a word to me all day, but sat for the most part still as a statue, and as handsome. He was only a servant in this valley of Olympians, but he had a face that, in any drawing room in Europe would have forced the eyes of every man and woman upon him like a magnet. At somewhere near eight o'clock, he brought his evening meal to the main hall, laid it on the low table, and began to eat. I withdrew to my bedchamber as if to sleep, though I'd not yet eaten my own supper, which I was in the habit of taking about nine.

After a while I became conscious of a curious stillness in the large room. I crept to the doorway and peeped between the curtain and the marble jamb. Tonight the great hanging lamp had been lit, and was filling the place with a soft fragrance usual with the luminant oils used in the valley, and by the light of this lamp I could see my jailer quite clearly—could see his face and the uncommonly languid expression it wore. The man was dozing. Two minutes later he was asleep, and five after that, I knew from the deep stupor he had fallen into that his food had been drugged.

So far so good. Now to get out. I rapidly searched him for the keys of the building. They were not on him. Nor could I find them in his quarters. I made a swift exploration of the whole place, but so far as escape went, I seemed to be no better off with my jailer insensible than before: the main door, and the one other door at the back of the house, were locked, and far too strong to be forced. However, the drugging of the attendant proved that friends were stirring for me—very capable friends at that, for the tampering with this man's food could only have been effected by extreme craft and daring; and I must apparently possess myself to sit down and wait to be rescued.

The hours dragged on, each seeming a week. I was getting desperate. I watched that attendant's face for any sign of returning consciousness, and had he given it, I veritably believe I should have strangled him in cold blood. But he remained quite motionless, sprawling on the couch, where he had eaten, and at last, to my inexpressible relief, I heard a gentle grating sound in the front of the house. A moment later the main door came ajar. I stared at the form that sidled through the opening, but though his face seemed curiously familiar to me, I couldn't recognize him at first. His skin was of the usual fairish tint of the valley, his lawn robes might have been the garments of any casual passerby in the street, and if his hair was a little straighter than that commonly seen about the city, it was at least cut to the common pattern. Yet for all the cosmetics and pomatums he had lavished on himself, I'm much afraid his low stature and high cheekbones would always militate against Lo Eng looking like a genuine native of Hellas.

"My master's wish, sir," he said, in his quaintly exact English, "is that you should follow me at thirty paces without seeming to follow."

In an instant I had darted into my bedchamber and snatched up the very small bundle I purposed to take on my flight, and had followed Lo Eng into the open air. There was no sound, no sign of movement; I think I have mentioned that it was rare for the citizens of the valley to be abroad long after nightfall, and it was now, I judge, about eleven o'clock. Even the sentries outside the house appeared to have been withdrawn, but as I stole across the courtyard I saw this was not so. I couldn't understand at first those white heaps lying on the marble flags; then I saw they were my guardians. Whoever had attended to the drugging had carried out the work comprehensively and well.

THE light was uncertain, but I had no difficulty in keeping Lo Eng's swiftly retreating figure in view. At last he stopped, and when I came up with him I found two litters waiting. These we entered and resumed our rapid journey across the city and out towards the plain beyond; soon, peeping through the curtains, I saw we had come to the outskirts, and some while after that we were clear of houses altogether. The bearers halted. As I climbed out of my litter I saw them drop simultaneously with their faces to the earth. A figure had emerged from a grove of

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fruit trees, approaching us, and a moment later Saunders Philipson was grasping my hand; he bade the bearers withdraw, then began to speak, hurriedly and earnestly.

"Listen closely, Mirlees," he said, "for everything depends on speed. If you are to leave this valley you must leave immediately. Are you prepared to risk it?"

"Anything is to be preferred to my last week," I said.

He laid his hand on my shoulder. "I am to blame for that," he said. "I who brought you here. But then—ah, it was all so vague and uncertain—how could I know? However, that is past. I am doing what I can to make amends. Believe me, Mirlees, it is not without risk to myself that I am helping you to get back to your own world. When the populace learn that you are gone, fear of invasion from without may overwhelm even their devotion to me, and if both the people and the Nine turn against me, I am like to lose kingdom and life in an hour. After Poyning and you broke into the tomb, Kalliboas went straight over to the party of Kalliphanes, and worked for the death of you both.

"But"—here Philipson passed his hand over his brow, as if recollecting something he would have been glad to forget— "there were powers in this valley greater than those of Kalliboas. My rival's faction have made great head, none the less, and at this moment my fate actually swings in the balance. However, I am prepared for either destiny. Many times you risked your life helping me to a kingdom, Mirlees, and I will cheerfully risk mine helping you out of it. Now, as to affairs in the outer world. When you reach Chungking, show this seal to En Chin, and he will hand over the launch to you—it may be of service. Here is a signed deed of gift which makes you the possessor of that boat and such monies as still stand to my credit in the Bank of Cathay.

"There will be more than enough to repay you for the time you have spent on this adventure, though your services to me not all the money in Asia could requite. But one thing—as you value your life, be constantly on guard. The enemies who tracked us up from the sea may have lost sight of us, but they have not forgotten. They will wait years for vengeance if necessary, and it is possible that watchers have been left at the last point to which they followed us, on the chance of our returning by the same way. You may even deem it safer to avoid Chungking altogether —to strike northward for the Kok Nur route across Mongolia—that I must leave to your own judgment. But wherever you go, as soon as you enter the known world again, beware of the Holy Brotherhood of Shigates!"

"That's well enough," I said, "but I have to get to the known world first. I seem to remember that the trek this way was tremendously difficult, even with a party of us to help one another."

At this moment there was a sound of footsteps approaching. Philipson drew me swiftly in under the shadow of the orchard, and we waited, with held breath.

"Friends," he muttered. "All's well. Come with me."

I followed him out on to an open plot of grass land, where we found two men carrying between them something like an enormous cigar. This they laid on the ground, and one of them turned and came towards me with outstretched hand.

"After many days, Mirlees," said Stephen Poyning. "You've just got out?"

"Not half an hour ago."

"It's my first night loose too. I've put it to good use. Philipson didn't want to take more servants into his confidence than he could help, so I went with Ah Sing for this."

He pointed to the cigar-shaped object, which I now saw was a folded pair of wings of the largest type, fitted with that peculiar "carapace" above the hinges.

Philipson had stooped in silence, and was examining the structure all over.

"You should be a skilled flier by now, Mirlees?" he said briskly, looking up.

"Pretty fair with the wings of the school. I've never used this pattern."

"Kneel down here, and I will show you the difference. These are harder at first, but afterwards there is no comparison—they will carry you far faster, and the greater wing-purchase will give you longer rests. On these wings, barring accidents, you should get over the worst of the heights before daylight. Then the dawn-wind will set in from due west—your very course—and blow steadily all day, as it almost invariably does at this time of year. With the help of that and the power you should get so far across by sunset as to be well down off the ridges and over a spot where you may risk resting in the open. As soon as you come into inhabited country again, burn the wings and make your way on foot. There—it's risky enough, but our people have often done as much and more. What do you say?"

"How about the cold?"

"I have prepared for that. Here is one of the suits used by our own fliers when they go over the heights. Once you have put it on you must get out of this valley quickly, however, or the heat of it may overcome you."

"And the power?"

"That is quite easy. This lever sets it in

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BLIGHT...

By L. Major Reynolds

It lived to destroy and destroyed to live, the evil monster whom few had seen and none could kill....

THE invisible bit of something did a pirouette in the breeze from the open door. It lifted easily, and floated down the long hall. Another door opened, and suction took it into a room. It nestled close to the form of a sleeping dog. Huddling nearer, it seemed to vibrate. It grew with incredible rapidity for a moment. The dog shuddered, moaned and died.

The thing was stronger now. No longer entirely dependent on the breeze. A sort of mobility had been attained. Steps sounded, and a foot came close. A mighty effort, and the thing was clinging to the side of a shoe. Clinging in the desperation of the desire it felt. The need of the life-forces sensed seeping even through the heavy leather. For long moments it clung, gaining strength with each passing minute.

The shoe was removed, flung away. The thing slid into a corner.

"Helen, I'm going to lie down for a while. I feel rotten."

The man was on the bed, out of reach. The thing waited.

"All right, dear. I'm going to the store. It's so hot I'll bring some beer. You'll feel better after a little rest. I'll leave the door open so you can get what breeze there is."

Silence, and the thing inching against the warm, once friendly breeze. Grown now to the size of a mouse, and almost visible. Crazy angles passing over its surface. Almost alive. And hungry, avidly hungry.

The door at last. A stream of ants busily carrying away a bit of sugar. And then the line sprawled, in the pseudo-comedy of death. Tiny bit by tiny bit the thing gained.

A small kitten at play on the path was left in the bare-fanged grin of extinction. Stronger now.

An old man, lying in the shade of a friendly elm, sighed, and looked at nothing. The thing moved easily.

A group of children, running in the inexhaustible vigor of childhood. Then one was carried away, white and almost drained of the precious energy of life. The thing was active.

"Doc, you've *got* to save her! It'd kill her mother if anything happened to her baby. She isn't going to die, is she?"

"No, but it was a close call. She'll be okay now. I can't figure out what happened. I gave her a checkup last week, and she was in perfect health. This is one of those things we say couldn't happen, and then they do. If another attack like this strikes her, though, there will be no hope."

"Thanks, Doc, I'll watch her like a hawk.

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Crumpled wings fell . . .
and still the thing hungered.

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Whereabouts can I reach you if I have to?"

"My office will know where I am at all times. Call me tonight in any case, and let me know how she is."

The thing waited patiently. Moving at will now, but still hungry. Waiting in a dry gutter, for whatever chance might bring. Visible at last. Afraid. The first inkling of fear, of discovery.

A pair of lovers, arm in arm, strolling down the walk. A gradual weakening, and the bewildered boy, staring wide eyed at the crumpled form.

"I don't understand this. Your daughter is the second one today to have this same thing happen." The doctor was puzzled. "And old Mr. Evart's death was certainly peculiar. The coroner can't find any reason for it. His heart was all right, for I gave him a going-over about a month ago. Something's fishy about all this!"

"What can we do, Doctor?" The father was white faced from the strain. "We can't let anything like this go on. What could cause anything like it?"

"I've told you I don't know! If I did, there would be something done about it. However, I'm going to call the police."

The thing lay concealed back of a thick hedge, partially sated. Lying quietly for the moment. A green winged Luna moth lit on a low hanging branch. And toppled, to spread crumpled wings in the dappled rays of moonlight. Still the thing hungered, now in the first stirrings of knowledge.

Visible now, to any eyes. Only a faint pattern of the other-world corruscations on its surface. Shapeless as yet, neither knowing or caring. The only emotion, the sating of the insatiable hunger. Energy to live, energy to build.

The tiny crawling and flying things of the night, each giving, under protest, their bit of life. A wee, heavily-uddered field mouse, hurrying home, stopped, to moulder where she lay. Her nest of babies waited in vain.

The thing cringed at the sudden volume of loud voices and the blaze of light.

"I talked to the doc myself, and he said it must be some kind of an animal. But none of the kids saw anything this afternoon, and I don't believe in spooks." The sergeant of police didn't sound as confident as he would have liked. "Have they finished with that last yard yet? If they have, let's get going on this one."

A hand came through the hedge, directly in front of the thing. Instinctive hunger fought a brief battle with the faint bit of knowledge and instinct won. The hand groped for a moment, and was snatched back.

"Lookit my hand! It feels like it's dead! Whatever the thing is, it's in that hedge. Gimme a club!"

A smashing impact through the hedge, and a direct blow in the center of the thing. Wave after wave of hitherto unknown pain struck in blinding flashes. Frantically it squirmed away to seek another hiding place.

"I think I hit it! Throw a light over here. The club landed on something soft. Here's the place. See, the open part in the hedge where my club went through. Nothing there now, but I hit something!"

The search went on, and the thing, lying under a parked car at the curb, suffered almost audibly. The hard won energy was fading fast in the unceasing surges of pain. It shrunk rapidly into invisibility again, but with the knowledge it had gained remaining.

QUIET, and welcome darkness came. The search moved on. A few yards from the thing was the opening of a sewer. Long agonizing moments it took to travel that small space, then haven at last.

"Hey, Jim, take a look at the sewage before it gets in the tank. Did you ever see so many dead rats? I've seen at least fifty of 'em this morning. Suppose it's an epidemic?"

"Search me, but we'd better fish out a couple and send 'em to the Board of Health."

The thing was thriving, gaining in size, and learning fast. It crouched by the opening of the sewer and watched the outer world. Never again would it make the mistake of taking too much from any one of the thinking creatures. Always the little from the many.

A dog ventured too close to the opening, and was gone. The thing looked long at the shape before it, and knowledge came to the fore. Slowly it formed into the shape of its victim. A cautious few steps outside, and the glad cries of the children.

The single thought, a little from the many. But the avid hunger remained.

"If I didn't know better, I'd swear there was an epidemic of anemia in this part of town." The doctor was mumbling to himself. "Seems as if every child has the same symptoms. A sort of 'don't care' attitude. They act as if they were about half alive. . . . Half alive? Good God, that must be it. Miss Crane, get me the police!"

The sergeant was speaking. "I know there was something there that night, 'cause I felt the club hit it. And what about all those dead bugs, and the little field mouse we found? The bunch all kid me about wanting to be a hero, but, Doc, I *know* there was something behind that hedge!"

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(Continued from page 97)

action, this connects it with the rib; both are moved by the right hand reaching up, the arm flexed double."

I shook the both of them by the hand, then called up the Chinese servants and bade them goodbye also. Philipson helped me into the suit, a light garment but astonishingly warm, which fitted close to the body all over, leaving nothing exposed but the mask of the face; round my waist were strung my little bundle, a parcel of food, a packet of rough silver, and a flint with which I was to burn the wings when they had served my purpose. The latter were then opened out and strapped on.

DESPITE the ghastly experiences of my imprisonment, I felt surprisingly vigorous and alert, whipped up, I've no doubt, by excitement; and though I found these heavier wings were indeed harder to use than the unpowered type—particularly when it was a question of first getting up from the earth—I managed to rise on a light puff of wind and swept round once or twice with fair ease. The power was easy to manipulate in the extreme. I had barely moved the second lever when I heard something swing into place with a sharp clink and felt the wings suddenly begin to flap without any help from my arms.

Though I had seen this pattern of wing before and speculated long on its secret, I must admit my first experience of it at close quarters filled me with the utmost stupefaction. That strange power-box, emitting nothing but a faint clatter which was almost drowned in the rustle of the wings themselves, was working strongly and steadily within two feet of my head, yet not for all the wealth in the world could I more than vaguely guess how. Amazement gave way almost at once to confidence. It was incredible, of course, that I should really be able to cross tremendous ranges of mountains on this apparatus, yet I know that at that moment I was profoundly convinced I could. Then, remembering Philipson's injunction, I turned off the power; even so I was astonished to find how far my wings had taken me from the spot where Philipson and Poyning stood waiting.

I drew near, hovering in the way I had been taught, and swept my gaze back over the lost city of Hellas where it rose calm and magnificent, its white roofs gleaming in the moonlight. At that instant I saw something that set my pulses tingling with more than the exhilaration of flight. Away over the city, three or four black bat-like shapes had appeared in the sky. In a second I had begun to rise again, wheeling round short.

"Look over towards the city!" I cried.

"Goodbye and good luck to you all!"

I heard a sharp answering cry from below—

"Fly for your life!"

That was the last word I was ever to hear from the lips of the man I had known as Saunders Philipson.

My mind had been instantly made up. As in a lightning flash I saw my escape, which by this time had become a mad, overwhelming desire in me, suddenly threatened by those sinister shapes against the wan-gold sky of the night. All the horrors of my captivity of the past week rose again before me, and I determined I would make my dash for freedom now, pursuers or none, and that I would never be taken alive. So, with Philipson's last cry ringing in my ears, I pushed back the power-lever of the wings to its fullest, and swept furiously away into the night.

I had risen above the highest point of what had been our route in, in what seemed a few minutes—though it can hardly have been less than an hour—and was whirling at a prodigious pace over the long gutter-like depressions which, fortunately for me, preserve in this region a general east-by-west trend. On either hand towered majestic peaks, wilder and grander in this eerie light even than they had looked to our fevered eyes when we came, and though my own altitude was far below their summits I knew I must be little short of four miles above sea level. Height-sickness I certainly felt: I could taste blood as it trickled down over my lips, and my breath came in long, violent gasps; yet this malady seemed to attack me far less dangerously than when moving on the ground—which I attributed in some degree to the glow of warmth I felt all over me from my clothing, and to the fact that I kept my arms for the most part through the thong loops of the wings, thus producing a violent exercise and augmented body-heat.

I had glanced back several times for any sign of pursuit, but there was none. No doubt it was that that made me overconfident. I must certainly have relaxed my vigilance, for now, suddenly looking up, I saw quite distinctly a figure flying *ahead* of me. How that form could have got past without my having any suspicion, I was utterly at a loss to imagine, yet there it was; and more uncanny still was the fact that when I now looked behind I saw *three* figures only a few hundred yards from me. These were apparently the three pursuers I had seen over the city.

I plunged furiously on. It seemed certain enough that if four enemies could "bracket" me in this way both behind and in front, they would have small difficulty in heading me off if I turned out of my course; moreover,

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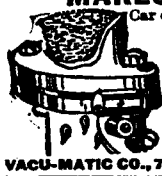

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to do that would necessitate climbing over the enormous ridges to north or south, at a height where the thin air might and probably would cause me to collapse altogether. In any case, safety lay to the east, safety and inhabited if uncivilized lands.

The mysterious chase went on. I don't think my pursuers were any longer gaining on me from behind, but I seemed to be steadily closing up with the figure in front, and was at last so near that I could almost distinguish the outlines of the body borne by those wings. It may be the moonlight and the wild frenzy of the escape deluded me, but the longer I looked the deeper grew my impression that what I saw was the figure of a woman. Moreover, though I was now a good deal nearer to this figure than to those behind, it seemed curiously less distinct, and grew less and less distinct the nearer I came. At any other time this would no doubt have amazed me, but amazement was a faculty I had now lost.

Then the figures behind grew indistinct also. They seemed to be melting into a veil of grey mist, which was approaching me a good deal faster than they. Then all became dark, the moon was blotted out, and I realized what that strange mistiness really meant.

WITH a blow that struck like something solid the tempest overtook me, hurling me forward with a frightful access of speed. I summoned every ounce of strength and nerve that was in me, and hung on. In an instant I was whelmed in the blackness of the Pit, whirled literally like an autumn leaf in a scurry of wind, conscious of nothing but the screaming wrath of the elements all round me and blank despair within. This, it seemed, was the end of all. I had lost control, was borne on and held up by the strength of the storm alone; sooner or later some devilish caprice of the wind must drop me, as a wanton child may break a plaything it is tired of, and then it would only be a matter of moments for me to be dashed to death against the cliffs and crags of the mountainside.

To steer was utterly out of the question, even to keep my equilibrium impossible; once I was tossed high and flung over and over like a bounding ball, until my head spun and my eyes were full of blood and I thought the straps of the wings must tear out the shoulders from my body; yet even here the very force of the tempest was my salvation, for though I fell, long before I neared the face of the mountain I had been caught up in a fresh blast of wind and hurled forward more furiously than before.

(Continued on page 104)

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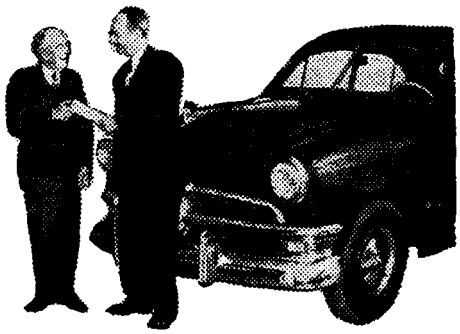

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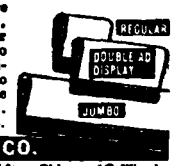

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FAMOUS FANTASTIC MYSTERIES

(Continued from page 102)

How long the storm lasted I would hesitate to guess within hours, but this much I can be tolerably sure of: that of all the amazing experiences I underwent during my quest of the lost land of Hellas, nothing came so near the miraculous as my escape through that tremendous tempest on a pair of artificial wings the use of which I was not accustomed.

At last the wind suddenly fell, in the abrupt way these mountain tempests will drop; the sky had cleared and the moon shone out again and by its light I could see the mountains below me white with great drifts of snow. Of my three pursuers and the mysterious figure who had preceded me there was no sign, and who they were or whether they perished in the storm I was never to know; but I don't fancy the form in front of me met with destruction, or could do so in the nature of things. When I say I believe that form was no bodily presence at all, but a vision sent to guide my escape, not to hinder it, I may be charged with superstition. If so, it won't distress me, or even shake my belief.

I came to a stretch of mountain that looked tolerably even, and decided to make a landing, for I was not only exhausted but ravenously hungry. I succeeded in alighting, and there, without even trying to loosen my wings, I squatted under them in the snow and ate several handfuls of food from the bundle strapped at my waist. The cold was terrific—far more than I had felt it in the air; and a moment later when I struggled to my feet and strove to ascend, I was near disaster.

So stiff had I grown even in that brief interval of rest that I came near crashing for want of a few sweeps of my wings to get me clear of the earth. Luckily, I had just strength enough to reach up and touch the power-lever. The broad wings answered faithfully to it, and within a few moments I was hurtling towards safety again as fast as ever. That was the last descent I was going to risk until I had done with flying for good. I knew that while I might yet remain in the air a long while, my strength was no longer to be trusted for purposes of rising again. Moreover, barring the danger of absolute collapse, those wings were the very best means of locomotion I could have wished, and might save me many weariful weeks of tramping over the pitiless heights.

A wind rose with dawn, not like the tempest of the night, but the steady day-wind of summer, and on this I made marvelously good progress. I kept at barely a hundred feet from the mountain, and though there was no de-

(Continued on page 106)

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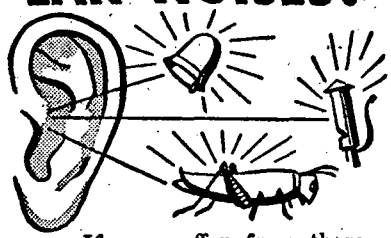

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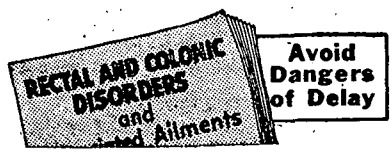

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FAMOUS FANTASTIC MYSTERIES

(Continued from page 104)

scent appreciable to the eye in that enormous elevated region, I knew by the rising temperature of the air that I was getting down. Beyond that, I knew little of what happened to me during that day. I flew on and on, in a sort of half coma. At times, I veritably believe, I was asleep, and had there been any more demanded of me than simply to rest on my wings, I must have assuredly come to grief. It was hunger that drove me down at last.

I was now past the limits of weariness, but I was hungry as I had never known hunger before. How long I had been in the air I couldn't even guess from my own recollection of the day, but I remember being drowsily amazed to notice that the sun was now beginning to dip behind the highest peaks westward of me. Also, I had a hazy impression of having once or twice during the last hour caught glimpses in the distance of what might have been rude human habitations. The time was come to destroy my wings, and seek shelter and rest.

I got to earth, loosened the straps and struggled out of them, and looked around for fuel. There was a fair quantity of coarse withered scrub sticking up through the snow here, and I soon had a pyre built big enough for my purpose. On to this I dragged the wings and held my flint ready to kindle the strange sacrifice. Up to the present, be it noted, I had acted under a sort of blind impulse to perform a duty, as required of me by my oath; I didn't think, I couldn't. The long-deferred sleep was sweeping over me in waves; I was hard put to it to stand, and I retained just sufficient consciousness to know that if I fell I should lose it immediately. Then, however, as I stared at those wings, sleep for a moment retreated again, pushed back by an overwhelming curiosity.

I could not bring myself to destroy that marvelous mechanism without one last attempt to probe its secret. I knelt beside it and began tugging at the power box with my hands. I could make no impression either upon the box or the slender connecting rods that protruded from it. Time was short. The irresistible sleep might come upon me at any instant. I found a fragment of rock about as big as my clenched fist and set about breaking the box open with that. Standing at the head of the folded wings I raised that stone and hurled it down on to the wings with all the strength left in me. The next instant I was hurled down myself, while something spread itself above me, darkening the sky, and then was gone. *The wings had sprung up and flown away.*

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I LAY ON my back, gasping. Of all the uncanny shocks ever meted out to a human being, I question whether any could have been more startling than that one of mine on those lonely mountain slopes. For an instant I was veritably inclined to believe those wings embodied not only a mysterious force, but a sentient mind and will, and that finding themselves attacked they had sprung up to attack me. It was a fantastic notion, yet at the time and in the circumstances I imagine anybody might have been excused for harboring it. What had really happened, of course, was simple enough. In trying to wrench open that box with my hands, I had unwittingly pressed it down on to the brushwood; the jar of the stone forced it down still farther, thus causing the levers to turn and setting the power in action, and the wings had immediately unfolded and started to flap.

At first I thought the apparatus must come to earth for want of guidance, but there I had greatly under-estimated the cunning of the builder. So perfectly poised were the wings that they preserved their equilibrium from the start, automatically, and all the difference the absence of my weight seemed to make to them was that they rose far more swiftly and easily. They had lain on the pyre of scrub pointed due west, which direction they kept, and I wasn't long realizing those wings would come to earth only when the power in them was exhausted. How long that would take I had no notion, but when they finally disappeared into the sunset they appeared to me to be working as strongly as ever. Somewhere, no doubt, far out on those trackless mountain wildernesses, buried in blown dust and driven snow, there lies the wreck of certainly the most amazing and ingenious device ever perfected by the brain of man.

I was staring blankly after my lost pinions when I became aware that a party of natives were spying me from a big boulder at some distance away. I called to them, but they seemed a good deal readier to run away than come near; it was pretty obvious they had witnessed my dealings with the automaton and set me down for a wizard of the mountain conjuring up familiar devils. Like Saunders Philipson, I knew something of this breed and how to treat them; and without taking any further notice of them I turned away and lit my fire and sat warming myself and counting over one or two pieces of my rough silver. It had the desired effect: they gradually gained heart and drew near. I told them I was a traveller who had strayed from my party, and that being without food and seeing the great bird perching on the mountain I had attacked

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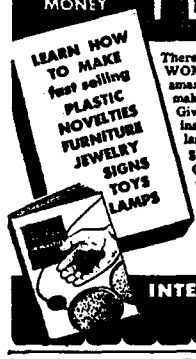

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it with a stone, but that it had escaped from me.

They listened politely if awesomely to my tale but obviously didn't believe it, and without Philipson's very serviceable rough silver I don't imagine I should have got much help from those natives. As it was, they helped me down to their wretched hill-village, and thence, after I had rested several days, set me on my way back towards civilization. The journey, which took three or four weeks on foot, was totally devoid of incident, and I pass it over in silence; but before leaving this phase of my adventure I will record one thing which may be of interest as indicating, however roughly, the geographical position of the lost city of Hellas. Since my return to the outer world I have made many calculations of the distance I covered altogether in making my escape.

The result is pretty amazing, but I have checked and re-checked my reckonings—the journey there as against the journey back—and if the figures err; it is probably on the side of understatement. During the eighteen hours of my flight from Hellas to the point on the mountain side where the party of natives found me, I must have travelled not less than *nine hundred English miles.*

I hurry on to the end, for I know that little time is left to me to complete this record. At Chungking the boatman, En Chin, handed over the launch on production of Philipson's seal, and believed readily enough that I was the sole survivor of our party—a tale to which my extremely weather-beaten appearance must have lent support. From En Chin I learned that only two days after we left Kiai a Tibetan had come to him inquiring our whereabouts. En Chin had his instructions from Phillipson, however, and observed them; said we had gone on up the main stream, destination unknown; and he thought the man had then left in that direction, for he saw or heard no more of him.

I spent a day overhauling the launch, engaged a native to help me run her, and went to bed in Chin's house by the waterside. That night I dreamed of Hellas, long and confusedly. The city was in vast turmoil, out of which emerged at last the face of Saunders Philipson, sombre and forboding—I almost felt in my dream that he was striving to warn me against something. I woke with a start, full of a strange but very urgent impulse to get gone. I rose, roused En Chin and my native boatman, threw some provisions into the launch and ran her down from the yard into the river. I had made most of my other preparations overnight, and within five minutes

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we were dropping down stream, drifting, for there was little petrol to be got so far inland and I wanted all I had for the rapids below.

It lacked still an hour or two till dawn, but suddenly, a little while after we had left, we both noticed a queer light in the sky behind us. I didn't know the cause of it then. Some weeks later I learned that En Chin's house had caught fire and been destroyed, with many other native houses, barely an hour after our departure. It may have been accidental, but I don't think so.

ARRIVED at last in Shanghai, I settled down in my old hotel, living very quietly—but not for want of funds; setting aside Philipson's bank balance, which was substantial, that little bundle I had kept by me all the way back from Hellas would, I knew, see me through to the end of my days in a good deal greater affluence than I wanted. I heard no mention anywhere of the affair that had immediately preceded our flight from Shanghai, and it seemed that, so far as the police were concerned, that episode had been let drop. I soon got to know, however, that in other quarters it was neither forgotten nor forgiven.

Three days after I arrived, a shot was fired at me from the window of an empty house in the suburbs. The police investigated that matter, but they never knew who fired the shot. I knew without investigation. A week later, returning to my hotel after dark, I was very clearly lariated and three-parts strangled by two natives, one of them I fancy a Tibetan, working from a dark doorway; and two days after that, as I walked in broad daylight down a crowded street in the Chinese city, a knife whizzed past my ear and buried itself an inch deep in a pillar of hard wood.

From that time onward attempts on my life were frequent.

I drew more and more into seclusion, keeping to my rooms at the hotel for days together, yet even here I wasn't safe. One day, when lunch was brought up to me—I never used the public rooms for meals—I noticed as I shook some cayenne pepper from the caster that the stuff was curiously light in tint. Now since my return I had often dreamed of Hellas both by night and day, and before long it became too obvious to escape remark that shortly after these dreams I was invariably in danger from my enemies.

Coincidence, or some subtle warning conveyed to me from that mysterious land beyond the snows—I've no time to discuss the point now; but the fact remains that on the night before I detected that curious pallor about the cayenne pepper, I had dreamed of Hellas very

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vividly indeed. I called up the manager and had the stuff analyzed. The chemist reported a rare and very deadly alkaloid.

By midnight I had come to a pretty far-reaching decision—no less than to write a full and accurate account of my visit to the lost land of Hellas. My reason for doing this was simply that I was unwilling my secret should die with me. That I must die before long, I was fully convinced. My enemies had made it quite clear to me by this time that they would only be satisfied with my death. I might—though this is doubtful—prolong the hunt by fleeing from China, but that I declined to do. The great Yellow Land which has been the subject of my life-work has been my home for many years now. I have few friends in it, but none at all outside, and there is at this moment, I believe, no relative of mine left living. I would stay where I was, and pray that time might be left for me to complete the record.

I write these final words as fast as pen will travel over paper, for I know the end is near.

I began to write, working night and day whenever my brain was clear enough to think and remember. It was not so always. I think it was on the night I finished my chapter describing our descent into the valley of great birds that the first attack came upon me. I have no time here to describe the visitation, nor is there need, for it was a recurrence, threefold intensified, of that paralyzing oppression of spirit I had known during my imprisonment in Hellas. I knew what it meant. I was paying the penalty of my broken oath, to a people more terrible by far than any secret organization of natives in the outer world. Almost have I expected to see materialize, in this room where I write, the tall, stern, accusing finger of some wise one from the Hall of Wandering Souls.

May God have mercy upon my soul.

EPILOGUE

SO ENDS, in a hand markedly hurried and scrawled in comparison with the earlier portions of the manuscript, the narrative of Ronald Mirlees which was brought into my room on that bitter Peking morning so long ago: a narrative which, leaving out of consideration the ingenious but confessedly fictitious compositions of the professional romancers, struck me and strikes me still as the most remarkable record of human experience ever set down in black and white. I have already written, in my preface to the manuscript, that the reader must judge for himself

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of its truth or falsity; but I may perhaps fittingly add a few lines as to my own view and the circumstances under which this narrative now comes to be published.

Firstly, regarding Ronald Mirlees, the writer of the manuscript. I had had personal experience of him in the past, and found him to be a man of the staunchest trustworthiness.

Then as to his proofs. These are admittedly scanty. Yet the uncut diamonds which he sent me were real enough and, as I found when I came to have them polished and weighed, of extraordinary value. This fact alone must be accepted as ample evidence that he had visited a region yet undiscovered by the world. As is well known, there are tracts of the wild mountainous land to the west of China where valuable minerals are found in plenty—particularly the minor precious stones such as amethyst and jade; but anything like the rich diamond field from which these magnificent stones must have come has certainly not yet been brought to light.

Next, I endeavored to find out something about the men whom Mirlees describes as having accompanied him on his adventure, paying a special visit to Shanghai for this purpose. At the consular offices I discovered that a British subject named Stephen Poyning had indeed been registered as a newcomer to China but very shortly before the time when Mirlees' narrative begins.

Of the man known as Saunders Philipson I was able to collect several scraps of hearsay. Most of the evidence represented him as a person of wealth and extraordinary habits.

The manager of the Bank of Cathay told me that he had known Saunders Philipson.

Whether later exploration will confirm Philipson's claims, only the future can show. For myself I will say candidly and without fear of derision that I believe that somewhere deep amid the mountain solitudes there *does* exist that Navel of Light; that it is peopled by a race from whom the outer world has much to learn, not only in scientific ingenuity but in breadth and humanity of ideas; that it is ruled by a modern Greek of great personal beauty and strength of body and mind; whom the folk of Hellas believe, rightly or wrongly, to be the reincarnated personality of their great founder. Whether my belief is warranted or not, let the reader of this narrative decide. I have done my part in publishing, literally and without so much as the addition or removal of one comma, the manuscript which reached me from the representatives of Ronald Mirlees shortly after his lamented and most mysterious death. ■ ■ ■

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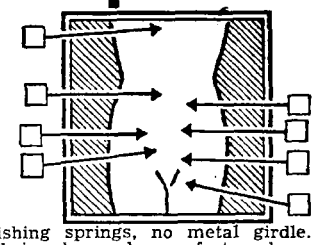

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FAMOUS FANTASTIC MYSTERIES

(Continued from page 100)

"I know now there was too, Sergeant, but I can't tell you what you hit. Whatever it was, it's back again, and I'm licked. We can't keep every child in town under lock and key. Well, get the men together and we'll start looking again."

And look they did. In daylight this time, accompanied by the languid children, and a frisky dog. An affectionate dog, who would lean against a leg for a moment, or beg for a caress.

The search went on relentlessly. Even into the treetops.

"Hey, kids, whose dog is this? Try and keep him away. I've stepped on him a dozen times."

"That's Rusty. He belongs to him. He plays with us all the time now. He didn't use to like to play with us, but he does now."

"Well, keep him with you, and away from us. We're too busy to bother with him. Here, kid, pick him up and hold him."

The moment came when one of the searchers looked in the sewer opening. And pulled out the carcass of a brown dog.

"Hey, *that's* Rusty! See, that's his collar. I thought he was here with us." A medley of childish voices.

A crumpled form lay in the street. And the friendly dog was gone.

The doctor was grim. "Sergeant, keep a man detailed to this block, to kill that animal on sight! Don't ever let it get near any of the children, or adults either. I have no idea what that thing was, but I know it wasn't a dog! Help me with this child!"

The thing was back in the sewer again. Once more, hunger had triumphed over knowledge. It was eager now. The taste of the outside world it had known, called for return.

It came out at night now, and watched. Watched and learned, watched and gained. The way of lovers in their nightly strollings. The clasped hands, the stolen kisses. Always a contact. The contact needed for the taking of the precious energy.

The rats died by hundreds. So little food in so short a life. So little from so many. Slowly the thing grew.

Knowledge at last of the way. The long crawling change. The watchful hours taught the need of clothing. And little by little, that need was fulfilled.

The shape took the form of a girl.

The thing stood on the street corner, and looked about. It went slowly down the walk, pursued by two ardent males. ■ ■ ■

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THE READERS' VIEWPOINT

(Continued from page 14)

well written. I think the plot is rather worn. If that had been "Wisdom's Daughter". . . ! There are too many stories about "End-of-the-world"—"new-civilization-who has-trouble-starting" on the stands (and in the libraries) today. However, that is just my opinion and many fans (especially the new-comers) may think different.

Congratulations on your return to pulpdom; I know you are as pleased as we fans are for this return to the old format. "Happy Birthday" seems rather cold on your twelfth birthday, but nevertheless sincerely meant—which reminds me, on my 24th birthday (August 1st) I will have been a year old reader of F.F.M.! So old yet so young.

What has F.F.M. offered the literary world in the past twelve years? I can answer that just from what I have read in the past year: well written stories, the best of authors and Finlay (!). If you have slipped on one or two ishes, all I can say is that no mag has ever approached—or even near it—the standards that make up *Famous Fantastic Mysteries*.

I do not quite think that I am actually qualified to comment on all of your stories so I will just say that of the short stories, I think that "The Man Who Collected Poe" was one of the best F.F.M. has printed *in the past year!* If Mr. Hobbs (Louis M.) will write to "Japan L.P.F. Club, P. O. Box 19, Shinjuku, Tokyo, Japan" they will get him correspondents in the Orient—no fee on his part. Still plugging (exhaustedly) for H.R.H.'s "Wisdom's Daughter."

I remain fantastically yours,
ROY WHEATON,
"L.L. #1"

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NEEDS BACK ISSUES

I've been a sincere reader of your magazines, F.F.M. and F.N. both, since their beginning. I had all issues up to my entrance in the services in June, 1942. When I got back all were gone, donated to the paper drive. I'd like to have a list of all issues of both mags since their inception up to the present date, also where I could purchase any back copies or place my plea in your Readers' Viewpoint column so all eyes may perceive my earnest willingness to procure back issues.

Yours scientifically,
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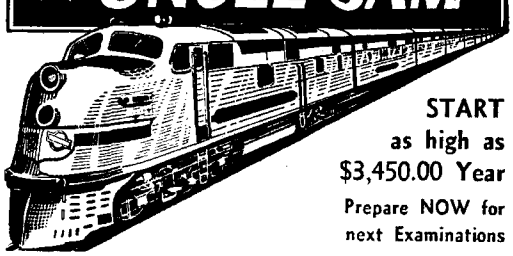

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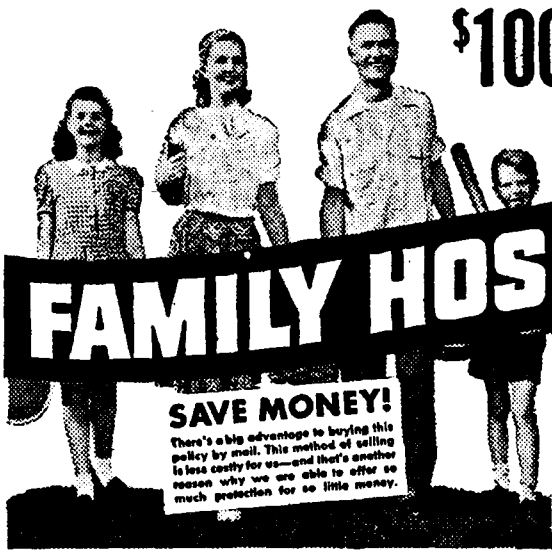

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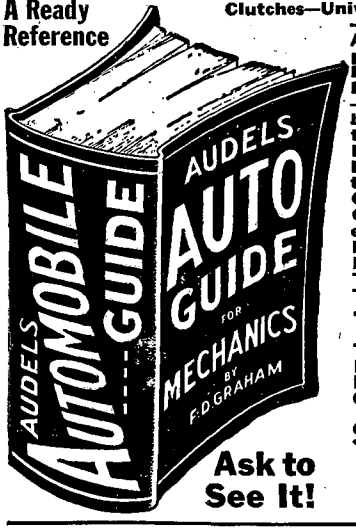

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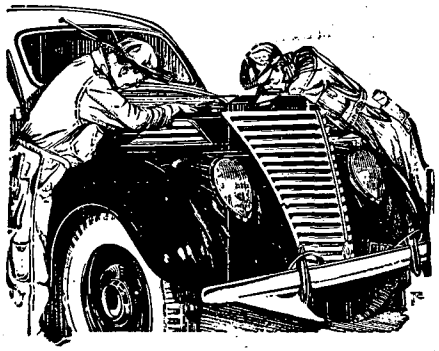

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